



IAAPA
NEWS

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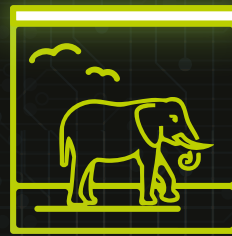
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The Technology Driving Attractions

- Using Facial Recognition for Admission
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How an independent FEC
beat the odds—and thrives

COVER DESIGN: JOSH MILLER

GAME ON SOCIAL HUB

PB&J

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Rope Drop

Build It ... And They Will Come

Silver Dollar City shares with IAAPA News Phase I of a \$500 million, 10-year expansion anchored by a 262-room hotel with vistas overlooking the Ozark Mountains and Table Rock Lake. Learn what's ahead for the theme park.



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Launch



INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Merlin and Minecraft: Building New Worlds

Milestone partnership will power physical and digital realms

by Juliana Gilling

ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR VIDEO GAMES, Minecraft, is coming to attractions owned by Merlin Entertainments. Leaders at Merlin and Microsoft first shared the groundbreaking news at IAAPA Expo 2024 in November. The global strategic partnership between Merlin and Microsoft-owned Mojang Studios, Minecraft's creator, is an intellectual property (IP) deal offering infinite world-building possibilities.

"We'd been talking for a long time and looking to find ways to work together," Paul Moreton, Merlin's chief development officer, explains. Two years ago, the stars aligned when Minecraft decided to explore location-based entertainment opportunities to connect with its fan base.

"We're really excited about this partnership," says Kayleen Walters, vice president of franchise development for gaming at Microsoft. "One of our strategies is to create more touchpoints for people to interact with the game, and immersive experiences are a great way to bring adventures to life."

Merlin will initially invest more than £85 million in the first two Minecraft-themed attractions, which will debut in the United States and the United Kingdom between 2026 and 2027, with more locations possibly popping up in the future. "We want to bring Minecraft adventures to many more Merlin destinations," Moreton tells Funworld. →

Creating Theme Park Attractions

Minecraft has a wide reach. It is the best-selling video game of all time, with more than 300 million Minecrafters worldwide and 141 million monthly users. Minecraft videos have topped 1.3 trillion views on YouTube and 35% of children aged 5-17 play in the Minecraft sandbox. “A Minecraft Movie,” starring Jason Momoa and Jack Black, is expected to become a box-office hit in 2025.

“We are always looking for partners we can scale with globally and create different formats. Minecraft is the perfect fit given its highly engaged community in every country and territory globally. The brand is big and it’s going to be a lot of fun,” says Moreton.

The partners will fuse the digital Minecraft game with the real world to create something extraordinary and unique for fans and visitors. “We call it ‘cross-reality’—Minecraft adventures made real, with digital elements and touchpoints to unlock exclusive in-game content. There will be world-first concepts, with guests able to eat, sleep, ride, and shop Minecraft,” Moreton shares.

Merlin promises new formats for Minecraft-themed accommodations, walk-through attractions, worlds (including rides) in existing theme parks, retail, and food and beverage offerings. “This is just the start. We expect the vision to evolve as we look at new ways to bring Minecraft to life across the Merlin estate.”


A Symbiotic Relationship

Minecraft is all about creativity, freedom, community, and interactivity. Translating that IP into real-life, immersive, and controllable attractions is proving a rewarding challenge. “Thinking about how we gamify the real world and replicate the creativity of the game has been the most exciting part of our development thinking,” Moreton says. “The idea is that the landscape is alive, and you can interact with and impact what’s happening around you. We will bring the game to park, and then the park back to game.”

Fans will be able to enjoy this exclusive game content after they leave Merlin’s real-world Minecraft adventures. “This will provide the public with exciting new ways to interact with our parks and attractions. Merlin guests should expect to see more of this in future across the portfolio,” Moreton says.

The growth implications are thrilling. “What’s exciting about this partnership is the potential to scale this across our business so everything is possible at this point!” Moreton says. “Like the game, Minecraft adventures can be on any scale—and our ambition is to see these being brought forward within resort theme parks, as second gates, and as part of wider clusters of [Merlin’s] Gateway attractions. We have already taken this approach with Peppa Pig and anticipate doing the same with Minecraft.”

So, might this deal pave the way for future collaborations between Microsoft games and Merlin attractions? “Never say never!” Moreton says.

For now, the partners are crafting an immersive, intuitive playground, bridging the gap between the virtual and real worlds, and offering guests a brilliant adventure that stays true to Minecraft’s spirit. 



“We are always looking for partners we can scale with globally and create different formats.”

— Paul Moreton



FUNWORLD VIDEO

Funworld speaks exclusively to Kayleen Walters, vice president of franchise development for gaming at Microsoft. Watch the video interview at [IAAPA.org/Minecraft](https://iaapa.org/Minecraft)

Minecraft Village rendering shows slides, a climbing structure, and characters that will make memorable selfie spots.



TM & © MOJANG AB

1 GROWTH SIX FLAGS CAPITAL EXPANSION



Investments in new rides, themed areas, dining, technology, and infrastructure totaling \$1 billion are headed to **Six Flags** properties in 2025 and 2026. The operator of 42 parks in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico already announced a slate of 2026 expansions early that include:

- **Carowinds:** record-breaking water ride
- **Canada's Wonderland:** record-breaking water attraction
- **Kings Island:** family attraction
- **Knott's Soak City:** water park refresh
- **Six Flags Magic Mountain:** first-of-its-kind coaster in North America
- **Six Flags Great America:** new kids' area and park enhancements

- **Six Flags Great Adventure:** record-breaking launch coaster
- **Six Flags Over Texas:** record-breaking dive coaster
- **Six Flags Mexico:** family boomerang coaster

More than \$80 million of the total spend is earmarked for food and beverage upgrades, including new restaurant concepts and equipment to generate improved menu offerings.

"The new Six Flags has a unique opportunity to refresh and renew the guest experience," says Six Flags President CEO **Richard Zimmerman**.

2 NEW AND NOTABLE

▶ HAUNTED DUTCH SPECTACLE

Efteling, the beloved Dutch theme park, debuted a world's first with **Danse Macabre**. Guests sit atop a turntable 18 meters in diameter featuring six smaller turntables. The **Intamin** ride system rises, sinks, tilts, and spins like a coin. Hourly capacity is 1,253. An accessible, alternative show for non-riders stimulates the senses with spooky sounds, images, and special effects.



EFTELING

▶ KONG CAPTIVATES JAPAN

In December, **Universal Studios Japan** opened **Donkey Kong Country**, expanding the popular Super Nintendo World land by 70%. The signature ride, **Mine Cart Madness**, is described as "a coaster design not bound by conventional ideas" by **Daniel Greer**. The producer with Universal Creative says the ride, sporting a 42-inch ride height requirement, will "make you seemingly jump over gaps."



UNIVERSAL

▶ FUN WITH PALEONTOLOGY

A collection of tyrannosaurus skeleton casts, fossils, and life-size displays make up **Tyrannosaurs—Meet the Family**, a new exhibit at the **Michigan Science Center** (called "Mi-Sci" for short). Mixing entertainment and education, the temporary exhibit features interactive elements, hands-on displays, touchable fossils, and interactive digital displays. The **Australian Museum** created the touring exhibit.



MI-SCI

3

TECHNOLOGY

MOREY'S GOES DIGITAL

MOREY'S PIERS



Spanning across its three facilities, **Morey's Piers**, along the New Jersey shore, developed a mobile solution for attraction access. Guests can place virtual passes on their smartphone using Apple or Google Wallet—allowing the viewing of balances in real time.

“Families love the convenience of not having to carry multiple paper vouchers and tickets,” says **Tyler Jacobs**, Morey's director of guest engagement and analytics.

Morey's partnered with Apple and Sunset Sky Creative, among others, to build the solution that integrates with the attraction's existing technology.

4

GUEST RELATIONS

INSTANT FEEDBACK

There's more than merchandise inside **Thorpe Park** retail locations. The U.K. theme park teamed up with **Avius** to gather feedback in nontraditional locations, like the exit store of **Hyperia** (a **Mack Rides** hyper coaster). “It's a balancing act between finding a location with good footfall and dwell time,” says Avius CEO **Ben Story**, adding that shielding guests from the weather and splitting the survey into sections encourages completion. “We'll often ask the guest if they have an additional 90 seconds to answer additional questions.”



SCOTT FAIS

5

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

BE MY NEIGHBOR

The producer of Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood, **Fred Rogers Productions**, and **Palace Entertainment** signed a multi-year licensing deal. The pact will allow Palace to bring family-friendly entertainment and attractions to six North American properties.

PALACE



6

NATURAL ATTRACTIONS

XCARET EXPANDS



XCARET

With a commitment to sustainability, Mexico's **Xcaret** will invest \$700 million to expand luxury offerings at **Hotel Xcaret Mexico**. Accommodations will double to 1,800 guest rooms, across 10 “casas,” each tailored for specific age groups. New attractions include 16 pools, five water slides, an adult speakeasy, and the unique Xinema, a 24-hour restaurant-movie theater. An expanded Muluk Spa will feature a family-focused wellness experience. The new attractions are slated for a summer 2025 opening.



HAVE A DISPATCH FROM THE FIELD?

Have a Dispatch from the field? Share your 2025 successes, wins, and innovations with Funworld. Send news and photos to FunworldWorks@IAAPA.org



AT CHAIN

Village of 12 Pavilions Form New Art Museum in China

A new Museum of Contemporary Art is set to open this year in Suzhou, China, about an hour west of Shanghai. Conceived as a village of 12 pavilions, the 60,000-square-meter museum offers a modern interpretation of Suzhou's garden heritage.

"Weaving between the Ferris wheel legs, the museum branches out like a rhizome, connecting the city to the lake. The result is a manmade maze of plants and artwork to get lost within," explains Bjarke Ingels, founder and creative director

of the architectural firm BIG, which designed the museum in collaboration with China's Arts Group and Front Inc. "Its nodular logic only becomes distinctly discernible when viewed from the gondolas above."

Each pavilion's facade is made of rippled and curved glass, as well as warm-toned stainless steel that reflects the garden colors.

big.dk/projects/suzhou-museum-of-contemporary-art-18410

Studio Ghibli's Magic Enchants Museum Visitors in Singapore

Spanning 11 galleries across two levels, The World of Studio Ghibli exhibit envelops visitors in theatrical sets meticulously crafted on-site at Singapore's ArtScience Museum by a team of Japanese artists. One of the largest exhibitions to be shown at the Marina Bay Sands museum, each piece was handpicked by Studio Ghibli and designed to reflect the same attention to craftsmanship and narrative depth that permeates the studio's films.

"The large-scale installations in this exhibition have been created with a focus on size and realism, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the world of our films," explains Studio Ghibli Vice President Shinsuke Nonaka.

marinabaysands.com/museum.html



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THERME MANCHESTER

Therme Manchester Resort Breaks Ground in England

Work has begun on Therme Manchester, the well-being and water park resort coming to Manchester in the United Kingdom. Construction is underway next to the Trafford Centre—a shopping mall and entertainment complex featured within a larger entertainment campus, TraffordCity.

“We are delighted to have received approval for our Section 73 planning amendment, driving the realization of our vision for Therme Manchester,” says Professor David Russell, CEO of Therme Group UK. According to Therme, the refined designs will incorporate advanced energy-efficient systems such

as ground and air heat pumps, significantly reducing CO2 footprint, and water usage.

When complete, the vast resort will combine indoor and outdoor swimming pools, water slides, saunas and steam rooms, relaxation areas, leisure activities, gardens, swim-up bars, and thermal pools.

James Whittaker, managing director of developer Peel Waters, welcomed the news, saying, “We can now all focus on the delivery of this phenomenal and much-anticipated resort in TraffordCity.”

thermegroup.com

Austrian Aquarium Announces Ambitious Expansion

Tiergarten Schönbrunn in Vienna revealed expansion plans with the goal of earning the title of Austria's largest aquarium. The 4,000-square-meter facility will showcase the underwater world's diversity and give visitors insight into the zoo's conservation breeding programs. “With the new Artenschutz-Aquarium, we want to create a place that shows fascinating and threatened habitats and at the same time raises awareness of their protection,” says zoo director



Stephan Hering-Hagenbeck. Secretary-General Eva Landrichtinger, owner representative of the Schönbrunner Tiergarten-Gesellschaft mbH, adds: “Innovations are essential as a world-leading zoo.”

Manfred Wehdorn is the architect for the attraction, which will be built on the site of the old exhibit. During construction, the zoo will relocate the aquarium's inhabitants to the zoo's new €4.2-million aquatic research station. The Artenschutz-Aquarium is projected to open in 2028.

zoovienna.at | artenschutzaquarium.at

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ACTIVATE

Majid Al Futtaim Brings New Experience to Dubai

Majid Al Futtaim Entertainment, operating inside shopping malls, retail, leisure, and mixed-use communities across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, has introduced the high-energy Activate gaming experience to the City Centre Mirdif mall in Dubai, UAE.

Guests can jump, climb, dodge, and problem solve their way through more than 50 interactive games and nine light-up game rooms. The gameplay includes 100 levels, ranked from easy to extreme. Players can work cooperatively or compete.

Majid Al Futtaim's strategic partnership with Activate allows the entertainment group to be the exclusive provider of the active gaming experience, as well as diversify its portfolio.

"The launch of the first Activate in the Middle East reaffirms our commitment at Majid Al Futtaim to deliver innovative and engaging entertainment experiences for our guests across the region. The unique blend of gaming, entertainment, and physical activity complemented by cutting-edge technology offers something truly unique for friends and families looking to create great moments together," says Ignace Lahoud, chief executive officer of Majid Al Futtaim Entertainment.

Adam Schmidt, co-founder and CEO of Activate Games, says the Dubai opening "signifies our commitment to bringing innovative experiences to diverse audiences worldwide."

playactivatemenae.com | majidalfuttaim.com

World's Second Sphere Planned for Abu Dhabi

Sphere Entertainment Co. and the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) will work together to bring the world's second Sphere to Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. They aim to dazzle audiences in the UAE's capital city with the music venue following the success of Las Vegas' Sphere, which debuted in 2023. The giant orb-shaped landmark mesmerizes guests with immersive cinematic experiences using the Sphere's curved LED canvas. Located in a prime spot in Abu Dhabi, the new project will echo the scale of the 20,000-capacity Sphere in Vegas.

"The vision for Sphere has always included a global network of venues, and today's announcement is a significant milestone



toward that goal," says James L. Dolan, executive chairman and chief executive officer of Sphere Entertainment. H.E. Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, chairman of DCT Abu Dhabi, says, "Sphere Abu Dhabi will seamlessly integrate advanced technology with captivating storytelling, creating unforgettable memories for everyone who visits."

The partnership aligns with Abu Dhabi's Tourism Strategy 2030. The blueprint aims to boost visitor numbers from more than 24 million in 2023 to 39.3 million by 2030 and ensure the emirate's sustainable growth as a global tourism destination.

thesphere.com | dctabudhabi.ae



Toca Social MONTERREY

Interactive Fútbol Experience to Land in Mexico

Mexico will soon welcome its own Toca Social, a top-notch interactive experience devoted to fútbol. The northern city of Monterrey will host the first Mexican franchise of this concept, combining interactive fútbol, immersive gaming, and world-class food and drink.

First conceived in the United Kingdom, Toca Social invites guests to engage with live fútbol match screenings, state-of-

the-art technology, and games designed to accommodate players of all abilities. The new Toca Social location will feature game boxes with a capacity of up to 12 players each.

Toca Social has partnered with local group Ventura Entertainment to bring the joy of interactive fútbol to Mexico. Construction began in Monterrey's Galerías Valle Oriente in August of last year. The venue is expected to open in late 2025.

toca.social/international

Guatemala's Museo de los Niños Births New Addition

Located in Guatemala City, Museo de los Niños is a family-friendly venue where children of all ages can learn through games and interactive exhibits. The museum has developed a new attraction in collaboration with the Guatemalan Air Force and Pulp—an aerial simulator that gives children the opportunity to be pilots, learn about aviation, and fly over Guatemala City inside an aircraft.

Housed in a Cessna 210 Centurion donated by the United States Air Force, the simulator experience lasts approximately two minutes and showcases visuals produced locally for the attraction. Aeroaventura, which roughly translates to Aerial Adventure, opened last July and has quickly become one of the museum's most beloved exhibits.

The new exhibit is included in the general admission price. As a safety measure, access to the venue is only permitted for adults when accompanying children.



AEROAVENTURA



NEON WORLD HERITAGE EXHIBITIONS

Neon Global Brings Ancient Peru to Modern Sydney

Sydneysiders can soon experience the magic of Machu Picchu thanks to a new immersive experience that debuts at the Australian Museum this month. Created by Peru's Museo Larco and Museo de Sitio Manuel Chavez Ballon in conjunction with Neon Global, Machu Picchu and the Golden Empires of Peru features more than 130 priceless artifacts, including gold treasure from royal tombs, glittering jewels, intricate masks, and objects of worship, as it tells the stories of five ancient empires dating back more than 3,000 years.

A virtual reality experience, Machu Picchu and the Spirit of the Condor also provides a bird's-eye "fly-through" of the ancient Incan city with cutting-edge drone footage and 360-degree motion chairs.

The new exhibit builds on the success of Ramses & the Gold of the Pharaohs, which attracted 508,000 visitors and was one of the highest grossing museum exhibitions in the region's history, according to a report by Inform Economics.

australian.museum/exhibition/machu-picchu

Madame Tussauds Celebrates Sign Language in Sydney

To commemorate the International Day of Sign Languages, Madame Tussauds Sydney welcomed hearing-impaired students from the Thomas Pattison School to create wax hands in the shapes of Auslan signs. Auslan is the sign language used by much of the Australian deaf community.

While at the museum, the students created molds of their hands while signing—which will later be used as educational tools—and enjoyed a guided tour that included "surfing" with Layne Beachley,



riding a motorcycle with Shah Rukh Khan, and encounters with their favorite superheroes, including Superman and Batman.

"We're thrilled to have welcomed the students," exclaims Madame Tussauds Guest Experience Supervisor Benjamin Franklin. "It was a highlight to see the students engage with all the wax figures, including Dylan Alcott's wheelchair tennis challenge and joining Harry Styles on stage."

madametussauds.com/sydney | nextsense.org.au/services/hearing/school

Digital Stars Shine at Science Museum Oklahoma

Science Museum Oklahoma opened the doors to its new Love's Planetarium—a state-of-the-art hybrid planetarium that the museum believes may be using more 4K projections than any other location in the U.S. The planetarium also boasts a GOTO Orpheus Star Ball, producing a high-quality star reproduction of the night sky for guests.

“At Science Museum Oklahoma, we believe that a cutting-edge planetarium isn’t just about showcasing advanced technology, but also about creating an environment that fosters a deep, meaningful connection to astronomy,” says Sherry Marshall, president and CEO of Science Museum Oklahoma. “The Love’s Planetarium offers a truly immersive experience where guests can feel the wonder of the universe in unparalleled clarity and comfort. This investment in both technology and guest experience ensures that our visitors can engage with astronomy in ways that might inspire a lifelong passion for learning.”

sciencemuseumok.org/planetarium



SCIENCE MUSEUM OKLAHOMA

Two Exhibits Debut at The Franklin Institute in Philadelphia

The Franklin Institute, a science museum in Philadelphia, unveiled two new exhibits on Nov. 23 as part of its 200th anniversary celebration. “We unveiled Body Odyssey and the Hamilton Collections Gallery during The Franklin Institute’s bicentennial year,” says Abby Bysshe, chief experience and strategy officer at The Franklin Institute. “Centered around the iconic Giant Heart and Baldwin Locomotive, these exhibits blend immersive design, interactive storytelling, and cutting-edge technology, reflecting our commitment to celebrating

our legacy while boldly shaping the future.” Body Odyssey, created in collaboration with design firm MDSX, reimagines the museum’s iconic Giant Heart with technology that allows visitors to hear their own heartbeat pulse through the model. Spanning 8,500 square feet, the \$8.5 million exhibit explores biological systems, biotech innovations, and personal health. The Hamilton Collections Gallery showcases rare artifacts like Benjamin Franklin’s lightning rod and the Baldwin 60000 Locomotive. Both exhibits are included in general admission.

fi.edu



PEL PRODUCTIONS



SHORNAA ISLAND

New Amusement Park Debuts in Ghana

This past September, the city of Accra witnessed the opening of a new amusement park near Labadi Beach, one of Ghana's most popular destinations. Built to be a family-oriented enterprise, Shornaa Island includes a mix of thrill rides, midway games, water features, and attractions.

With the opening of Shornaa Island, Ghana's capital is now home to large dry and wet inflatable playgrounds, and boasts a large bumper car ride. The park also features a giant piano, a

mini golf course, entertainment venues, and a musical lighted fountain.

The new park is cashless and operates with rechargeable cards and top-up stations. In addition to granting admission to the park, the card can be loaded with credits that can be used for purchases and attractions. Development doesn't end here—the Shornaa Island expansion plan includes ziplines and jet skis.

instagram.com/shornaa.island

New Beach Club Attraction Opens in The Bahamas

A retro daytime beach club has opened its gates in Stocking Island, an idyllic paradise in the Exuma District of The Bahamas. Located on a white sand beach along Elizabeth Harbor, Coconut Club offers water cabanas, shaded lounge chairs, locally inspired food, ping-pong tables, and snorkeling.

In addition, to access to a secluded pristine beach, Coconut Club features volleyball and bocce courts, along with swimming platforms for guests to jump in the Caribbean Sea. The credit card-only venue is family-friendly and has a Kid Zone for children of all ages.

Coconut Club is not far from George Town, the capital and largest town in the Exuma District. Yet, the town and the beach club are located on different islands. A short water taxi or private boat ride is needed to reach Stocking Island.

coconutclubbahamas.com



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Matthew Martin Named VP of Design

Matthew Martin is **Falcon's Creative's** vice president of design, a newly created position for the industry veteran. Martin has more than 30 years of global experience in the themed entertainment industry—working with Universal Creative, Merlin Entertainments, and Saudi Entertainment Ventures, among others. He has overseen the vision, development, and brand enhancements of multiple billion-dollar entertainment destinations. Martin leads a team of creative directors at Falcon's Creative as the company scales up its workforce to support new projects, including several in Saudi Arabia.



MATTHEW MARTIN

Nicolas Fournier Joins Triotech as Sales Director

Nicolas Fournier joined the media-based attractions developer **Triotech** as its new sales director. Fournier has more than 15 years' experience in business development, including most recently at D-BOX Technologies, where he was the director of commercial sales. "Nicolas' deep experience in entertainment, coupled with his strategic insight, makes him the ideal choice to propel our growth," says Triotech Vice President of Sales and Marketing Yannick Gemme. Fournier will focus on expanding Triotech's presence in Canadian and European family entertainment centers. He will also manage distribution in these regions.



NICOLAS FOURNIER

Sabrina Mangia New GM at Mirabilandia

Parques Reunidos has appointed **Sabrina Mangia** as the new general manager of Italy's **Mirabilandia** amusement park. "I bring with me a lot of product knowledge," says Mangia, who says parks increasingly pay heed to metrics like the Net Promoter Score (NPS) that measures visitor loyalty and satisfaction. Previously, Mangia was Mirabilandia's director of sales and marketing as well as the head of sponsorships for Spain and Italy.



SABRINA MANGIA

Gina Martinez Named Chief Executive of La Nube

El Paso native **Gina Martinez** is the new chief executive of **La Nube**, a Texan attraction that merges the educational aspects of a science center with the playful experiences of a children's museum. Martinez began her career as a special education teacher, then co-founded the award-winning Neon Desert Music Festival. Most recently, she was the regional



GINA MARTINEZ

director for Children at Risk, a nonprofit that focuses on policy work to reduce child poverty. Billed as El Paso's premier destination for transformative learning, **La Nube** ignites imaginations and inspires guests with Science Technology Engineering Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) based attractions.

Two Leadership Hires at Indoor Active Brands

Indoor Active Brands, which owns **Altitude Trampoline Park** and **The Pickle Pad** entertainment centers, is revamping its leadership team. **Sean Naughton** is the company's new chief financial officer, and **Jessica McDonald** was promoted to vice president of marketing at Altitude. Naughton was previously a vice president at CEC Entertainment, where he honed his expertise in financial forecasting, budgeting, competitive analysis, and performance metrics. In his new role, Naughton will focus on driving growth and expanding Altitude's footprint. McDonald joined Altitude three years ago and has driven key initiatives such as membership programs, gift card sales, and product development.



SEAN NAUGHTON



JESSICA McDONALD


Fiona Eastwood Appointed Interim CEO at Merlin

In late November, **Merlin Entertainments** elevated **Fiona Eastwood** to the position of interim CEO upon the resignation of former CEO Scott O'Neil. Previously, Eastwood served as Merlin's chief operating officer for nearly a decade. Roland Hernandez, chairman of Merlin Entertainments, says Eastwood's appointment "reflects the strength of leadership talent that we have built at Merlin." Merlin shared in a press release that the company's board of directors will conduct an "orderly process" to identify a permanent successor to O'Neil.



MERLIN ENTERTAINMENTS

Scott O'Neil Departs Merlin Entertainments

Days after appearing as a panel member at the Funworld Presents and Fireside Chat EDUSessions at IAAPA Expo 2024, **Scott O'Neil** rendered his resignation as **Merlin Entertainments** CEO to the company's board of directors. O'Neil has been hired as the new CEO of LIV Golf. He departed Merlin encouraging employees to be builders; be intentional in their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing; and to live their lives with purpose. 



MERLIN ENTERTAINMENTS



YOURWAVE

YourWave Surfs Into North America

An innovative stationary wave machine named **YourWave**, designed and manufactured in New Zealand, is now available in North America. Building on the physics of a standing wave, YourWave uses patented, chambered, air-filled waveforms and inflatable surroundings—the company says are akin to a bouncy castle—to make it safe to surf and even safer to wipe out.

Using YourWave, attractions can alter the size, shape, and speed of waves for surfers of all abilities. The system lowers power costs when running smaller waves for beginners and young surfers. YourWave can also produce a V-wave to simulate wake-surfing, allowing two people to surf simultaneously and enabling operators to increase throughput during peak periods.

yourwave.surf



ZAMPERLA

New Zamperla Family Coaster Installs on Two Continents

Papa Wutz' Achterbahn at **Peppa Pig** theme park in Günzburg, Germany, and **Snoopy's Tenderpaw Twister Coaster** at **Knott's Berry Farm** in Buena Park, California, are now open.

What do these two recently launched family rides have in common? They are both **Family Coaster 155s**, manufactured by Italy's **Zamperla**. The ride is billed by the manufacturer as "everyone's first big coaster."

"It has been a lot of fun for our team to work with the IP owners to design parks limited only by the size of imagination, allowing even the youngest riders to experience the thrill of their first coaster adventure," says Zamperla Roller Coaster Sales and Marketing Director Adam Sandy.

zamperla.com

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Jon Eyerly

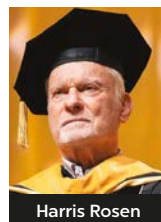
Jon Eyerly of Salem, Oregon, passed away at 82 on Nov. 6. A lifelong leader in the attractions industry, Eyerly joined his family's business, Eyerly Aircraft, which evolved from aviation to creating legendary amusement rides like the Rock-O-Plane and Octopus. He played a key role in continuing the company's legacy and is credited with holding several patents, most notably for Krazy Kars. Known for his forward-thinking approach, Eyerly concluded his distinguished career at Funtastic Rides, where he was respected as a pioneer and industry innovator.



AYERLY FAMILY

Harris Rosen

Known as one of Central Florida's leading entrepreneurs and philanthropists, Harris Rosen passed away on Nov. 18. After developing the Contemporary, Polynesian, and Fort Wilderness Resorts at Walt Disney World, Rosen purchased a 256-room Quality Inn on Orlando's International Drive. From a modest start, he grew Rosen Hotels & Resorts into one of the Southeast U.S.'s largest independent hotel chains. Rosen donated time, resources, and millions of dollars that led to the creation of the Rosen College of Hospitality Management at the University of Central Florida. The college offers students the opportunity to learn and work in the heart of Orlando's attractions industry, creating a talent pipeline to the industry.



UCF

Robert Fitzpatrick

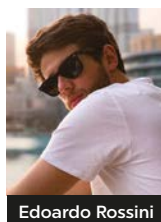
Robert Fitzpatrick, former president of the California Institute of the Arts and a pivotal figure in the attractions industry, passed away on Sept. 30 at the age of 84. Renowned for his visionary leadership, Fitzpatrick played a crucial role in shaping the cultural landscape of Los Angeles through his work on the 1984 Olympic Arts Festival. His influence extended to the theme park sector when he became president of Euro Disneyland (now Disneyland Paris), overseeing its opening in 1992 and laying the groundwork for its success. Fitzpatrick's commitment to integrating the arts into entertainment helped elevate the role of cultural programming in attractions, leaving a lasting impact on the industry.



LOS ANGELES TIMES

Edoardo Rossini

Edoardo Rossini, 28, passed away unexpectedly on June 24. His loss was announced by his parents, Manuela Sartori and Franco Rossini. After completing his studies in business administration, marketing, and communication sciences, Rossini joined the family company, Sartori Rides, three years ago. As chief marketing officer, he made a significant impact on the company's communication and marketing efforts, demonstrating his passion and talent for the industry. The attractions industry mourns the loss of this promising young leader.



INSTAGRAM

Carlo Guglielmi

Carlo Guglielmi passed away on Oct. 13 in Nashville, Tennessee, at the age of 73. Born in 1951 in Vicenza, Italy, Guglielmi embarked on a remarkable journey that would leave a lasting impact on the amusement industry. His career began in the 1970s when he joined Zamperla Group as a sales representative, quickly establishing himself as a key player in the field. As the founder and president of Ital International and Bertazzon America, Guglielmi became renowned for his expertise in brokerage, bringing attractions to traveling midways and amusement parks worldwide. Known for his vibrant personality and ability to speak five languages, he forged connections across the globe.



GUGLIELMI FAMILY

William Sullivan

Disney Legend William "Sully" Sullivan, 88, of Windermere, Florida, passed away on July 16 after a 38-year career with The Walt Disney Company that spanned both coasts. Born on April 18, 1936, in Fullerton, California, Sullivan began his journey at Disney as a ticket-taker at the Jungle Cruise after watching Disneyland's opening on TV in 1955. Over the decades, he grew into a key operations leader, helping to launch iconic projects like the 1964 New York World's Fair, Walt Disney World, and Epcot. Sully retired in 1993 and remained an influential figure in the company's history.



WALT DISNEY ARCHIVES

Bernie Marcus

Bernie Marcus, whose visionary leadership and philanthropy shaped Atlanta's cultural landscape, passed away at 95. As a driving force behind the Georgia Aquarium, Marcus leaves a legacy that extends beyond the aquarium itself to the broader community. His contributions to downtown Atlanta and ocean conservation made a lasting impact, setting a standard for educational and environmental initiatives.



DRESSLER'S JEWISH FUNERAL CARE

Dale Van Voorhis

Dale Van Voorhis, an influential leader in the attractions industry, passed away on Oct. 26 at the age of 83. Van Voorhis began his career at Cedar Point, where he connected with partners to establish amusement and entertainment company Funtime Incorporated. Together, they acquired and revitalized Geauga Lake, Darien Lake, and Wyandot Lake amusement parks, building them into beloved destinations known for memorable guest experiences. Later, he founded his own consulting firm and joined ParksAmerica before retiring in 2023.



VAN VOORHIS FAMILY

Industry Insights



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Sweet and Sassy at Silver Dollar City

AS SHE REGALES ME WITH TALES, June Ward never misses a beat assembling peanut clusters in the basement kitchen of Brown's Candy Factory. She expertly rolls the nuts and tempered milk chocolate together into perfect, delectable mounds using the skills she has honed for more than 56 years at Silver Dollar City, located in the Ozark Mountains of Missouri. Now 80, she says her bones are old and she can no longer stand straight, but her candy-making acumen remains sharp—as does her wit.

“My mouth works as fast as it ever did,” declares Ward.

And boy, does she love to talk. As Ward tells me about her apprenticeship with master candy makers in 1968, tricks of the trade, the many folks she has met through the years, and more, her passion for confections and Silver Dollar City as a whole is evident. The role has also granted her the opportunity to participate in some unique projects. When “The Beverly Hillbillies” filmed episodes of the TV show at Silver Dollar City in 1969, Ward was the stand-in for Donna Douglas, who played Elly May.

With her infectious smile and warm demeanor, she is disarming and as sweet as the candies she makes. But Ward is also wildly funny, playfully feisty, and loves taking center stage—attributes that have served her well in her long career at the park's 1880s mining town. Case in point: As we were chatting, a group of executives came to greet her.

“Andrew doesn't know a lot,” Ward informs me as Andrew Wexler, CEO of Herschend looks on with amusement. “And of course, he doesn't know anything good other than what we've taught him,” she adds.




SILVER DOLLAR CITY



Upon hearing Ward's trademark barbs, Wexler and his associates burst out laughing. They are part of a daily parade of folks who come to Brown's Candy Factory seeking an audience with the venerable Miss June. Multiple generations have enjoyed Ward's delicious treats and folksy charm, and grandparents regularly bring their kin to the shop, eager to introduce them to the charismatic dynamo.

Some 50 years on, Ward's candy cravings endure. She says that she finds the delightful aroma wafting in the air as intoxicating as I do. The self-proclaimed chocaholic's treat of choice are pecan turtles.

Watching Ward carefully craft candies and hold court with adoring visitors, I think about the joy she has brought to others for decades. Hers is an honorable and fulfilling pursuit. Ward says she has no plans to retire and hopes to make peanut brittle, fudge, and other scrumptious goodies while dishing out hilarious remarks as long as she continues to feel well.

“I've always loved working for this company,” Ward says. “I tell everybody, ‘When you have the sweetest job in town, why would you want to stop?’” 



A lifelong park fanatic, **Arthur Levine** first started writing newspaper and magazine travel features about the industry he loves in 1992. He produces his own Substack newsletter, “Arthur's About Theme Parks” at **AboutThemeParks.fun**



Valleyfair Partners with First Responders

Park plays host to aerial rescue drills

by Scott Fais

ON A CRISP, PICTURESQUE AUTUMN DAY while the sun shined, Valleyfair practiced for when things may turn cloudy. At first look, this image makes an impact. Yet, take a second look and discover this is only a drill.

“We look for different places that offer us a different variety of challenges in terms of their configuration or the hazards that have to be addressed,” says Mark Erickson, a leader with Minnesota Urban Search and Rescue Task Force 1.

Valleyfair in Shakopee, Minnesota, embraced the shoulder season last autumn by partnering with multiple search and rescue task forces who used the 125-acre amusement park to practice aerial rescue techniques.

“They’re helping us by offering the facility as a training place. But should they have a bad day, having previous exposure to the facility is going to help us get in there and perform more efficiently,” says Erickson, who recalls studying Valleyfair’s rides during the park’s Physics Day as a teenager.

Valleyfair Vice President and General Manager Raul Rehnberg agrees training exercises like these are a symbiotic relationship.

“One is to practice extrication and rescues on areas of the property that are more challenging. And the other is knowing how best to utilize our maintenance staff in support of those activities,” explains Rehnberg, who began in the industry at age 17 as a park services sweeper at Knott’s Berry Farm.

Valleyfair’s maintenance team participated in the rescue drill by learning what equipment first responders will need following a call for help.

“They now know we might need their manlift, so that piece can already be rolling after they make that call to 911,” Erickson says.



VALLEYFAIR

Rehnberg suggests attractions looking to form a lasting partnership with their emergency responders start by simply picking up the phone and proactively calling their fire department.

“I think the sooner you forge those relationships and partnerships, the better,” Rehnberg tells Funworld. “It has to be a continuous partnership. You cannot simply rely upon them during a crisis where there’s no baseline of relationship or understanding of each other’s procedures or perspectives.”

Rescue crews received a fresh perspective from 275 feet above the midway when lowering volunteers to the ground using a stokes basket, along with rappelling down Power Tower’s columns and Corkscrew’s track. The practice sharpened skills that can be transferred to other locations, such as television towers, bridges, cliffs and ravines, confined spaces, and taller buildings.

Prior to hosting a drill, attractions should connect with their insurance carriers to review their policies.

“At some places, it’s a delicate dance of working through the legal process,” shares Erickson. “We’ll actually have a written agreement that gets reviewed and signed by the legal folks.”

In the end, both the facility and the first responders are better prepared for a potential crisis.

“Hopefully it’s not something that we have to rely upon. But, by preparing for this kind of scenario, if it does come up, we can pull that lever and say, ‘Okay, let’s execute that plan that we’ve already prepared for, practiced for, and thought about.’ And that just gives you a lot more confidence,” Rehnberg concludes. **FW**

This is only a drill. In autumn 2024, first responders use a stokes basket to lower a volunteer to the ground during a training exercise 275 feet above ground on the park’s Power Tower ride.

To see video of the aerial rescue drills, visit the IAAPA News Hub at IAAPA.org/ValleyfairDrill



Scott Fais is IAAPA’s global editorial director. He’s received more than a dozen honors from the Associated Press and The Society of Professional Journalists for writing, editing, and content creation. Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#):





by **Michael Costello**

How Jaimie Enterkin Applies Her Sharp Wit and Vision

The new CEO of Extreme Legacy looks forward

AFTER GAINING EXPERIENCE OUTSIDE the global attractions industry in various leadership and acquisition roles, Jaimie Enterkin is now the CEO of Extreme Legacy—a new engineering design, ride supplier, and fabrication company. In her first sit down interview, Funworld connected with Enterkin to glean her experience and vision as Extreme Legacy prepares to expand its fabrication capabilities to Orlando.

How did you arrive at the name Extreme Legacy for the new company?

We purchased Extreme Engineering in November, their intellectual property and the catalog of items that they've developed, manufactured, and fabricated over the last 30 years. As we created our new company, we discussed how we wanted to acknowledge the incredible work and history of Extreme Engineering and CEO Jeff Wilson's legacy. Our name is a nod to him and Extreme Engineering's history. So, now we are building on that legacy as Extreme Legacy Limited, LLC.

Tell me about your background before joining Extreme Legacy?

Most of my career has been in project management. I pride myself in numbers. Numbers and analytics don't lie. So, that's where I have remained: working "back of the house." I like to say I can usually see things about seven steps before most and anticipating the need, any risks, the liability. That's my comfort zone and I bring that with me to Extreme Legacy as we invent forward.

What do you hope to accomplish within the first year as CEO?

We are eager to continue to meet the needs of our current client base, and grow the business. We have to be able to evolve many products in our catalog and there is more to come. I'm also excited to build our brand recognition within this industry.

Share your unique perspectives that you'll bring to the greater attractions industry?



PBAJ

I believe that by coming from the outside, I bring a new, fresh perspective to our clients and business approach. I am bringing my experience, and the strengths and abilities that I gained throughout my professional career—particularly my approach to analytics and acquisitions.

As a leader, how do you break through challenges?

When I see a problem at hand, I begin to break it down. I compartmentalize each piece of a situation and identify what needs to be addressed and what the core problem is. When you look at a situation and address it step by step, you are able to work through the challenge at hand more efficiently and effectively.

How do respected leaders motivate their teams?

I am blessed to have great mentors in my life, who have taught me a great deal. As a leader, I think we must think of a three-legged stool. You have employees, your leadership team working with you, and your clientele. You must always take care of all three sides, or the stool will fall. And to be successful at this, you must put yourself in other people's shoes and consider their viewpoint.

How will you be a role model to other women in the industry?

This new role has given me the opportunity to help break through. I think it would be a disgrace if I didn't use my voice and use my platform to help support other females coming up along with—and after me! I want to honor the women who have paved the way for me to be able to enter this industry in this new position and work to best serve the industry. 



Michael Costello is the managing editor of Funworld at IAAPA. With 20 years working in the attractions industry, he has also volunteered in his free time with the National Amusement Park Historical Association. Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#).





Bright Ideas

How EXP learned to place sustainability at the forefront of new projects

by Amy Pastor, PE, CxA, LEED Fellow, ENV SP, and Kate Sanoke LC, LEED AP

ONLY A DECADE AGO, SUSTAINABILITY WAS a common afterthought. Following completion of a project, the questions then would follow: “What can we do to benefit the environment? How can this project be more sustainable?”

A shift in recent years includes implementing sustainability considerations earlier in the process, minimizing the impact on the natural environment and preserving the built environment. Sustainability is now a focal point of many attractions, entertainment, and hospitality venues. The initiative now guides project goals, processes, and outcomes.

After 30 years in the entertainment industry, EXP has made the transition to embedding sustainability into all our operations. That includes implementing sustainable practices in our offices, working with our clients to meet their environmental goals, and improving and protecting the communities that are home to our projects. This work comes in many forms: from prioritizing decarbonization, to designing energy efficient buildings, and integrating water conservation elements into a building or site. We’ve found that no matter what the sustainability goals are for the project, the priority is that those goals are front and

center from the project’s inception and are baked into every phase.


As the effects of climate change continue to mount, we have seen an increase in demand from our clients’ guests and customers to be informed about how an attraction is working to protect the environment. It is the job of sustainability professionals to help clients meet their users’ requirements while also meeting our client’s requirements for sustainable practices.

EXP has found solutions in multiple disciplines, including sustainable lighting design. By using energy-efficient LED sources, incorporating smart lighting controls, and minimizing light pollution by thoughtfully

“... by thoughtfully reducing unnecessary illumination, attractions can make a real difference.”

— EXP

reducing unnecessary illumination, attractions can make a real difference. We also recommend seeking out manufacturers who are committed to sustainable practices in the materials, manufacturing, and maintainability of their products.

Progress is happening on small and large scales across the global attractions industry, but we can still do more to protect the built and natural environment. The path to reaching our goals begins with educating our employees and clients, regularly assessing and documenting our efforts, and placing sustainability at the forefront of our projects. 



Amy Pastor, PE, CxA, LEED Fellow, ENV SP is EXP’s VP of sustainability. In her role, she is responsible for the development, implementation, and measurement of EXP’s corporate sustainability goals. Connect with her on [LinkedIn](#):



Kate Sanoke, Associate IALD, LC, LEED AP is EXP’s director of lighting. She plays a vital role in developing innovative and effective lighting plans for a wide variety of clients. Connect with her on [LinkedIn](#):

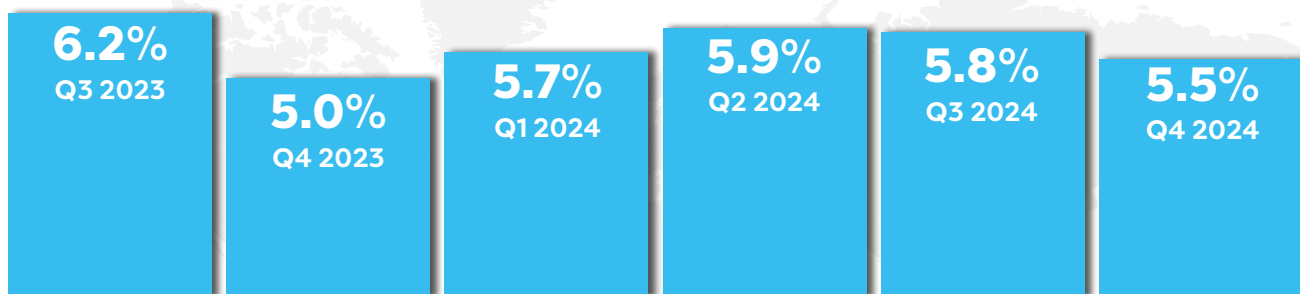




Q4 2024 Quarterly Outlook Survey Highlights

Conducted every quarter, this study highlights attraction facility participants' expectations over the next six months.

Key topics include outlook for the global and respective regional economies, sentiment regarding select business conditions (e.g., available workforce), expectations for future business performance, as well as top opportunities and challenges. Q4 2024 key findings are summarized below.

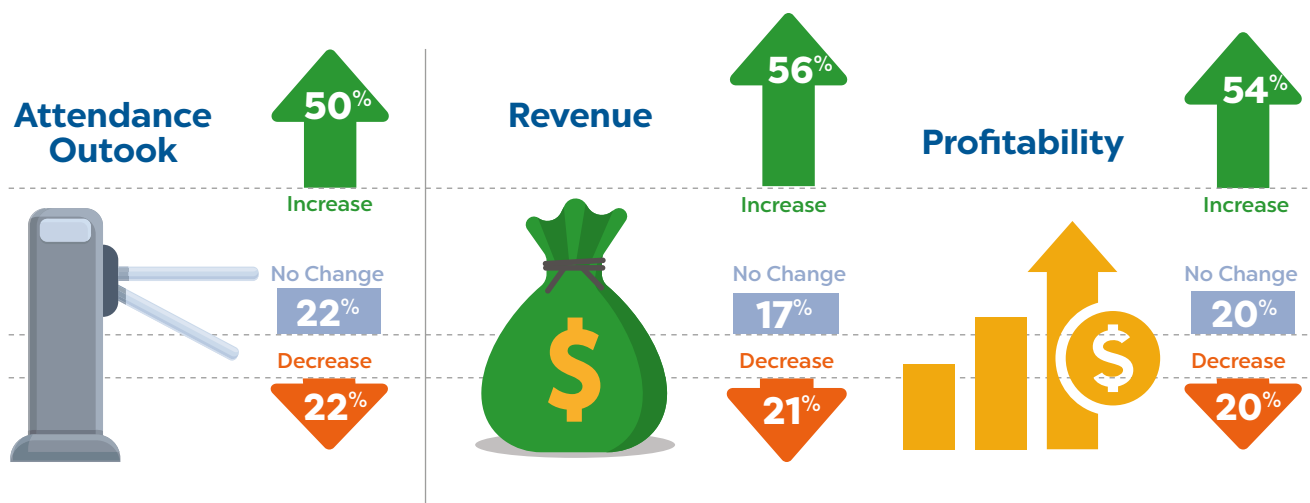


Global Economy

The outlook reflects concerns over geopolitical issues and political uncertainty. In response to the question “How do you feel about the global economy over the next 6 months?” respondents yielded a mean score of 5.1 on a 10-point scale (1=very pessimistic, 10=very optimistic).

Industry Outlook

At least half of respondents anticipate increased attendance, revenue, and profitability over the next six months. However, the percentage projecting higher attendance and revenue has trended down since Q1 2024. We asked: “In the next six months, compared to the same period a year ago, how does your business expect to perform in the following areas?”



Kelly Repass serves as IAAPA's head of global research. Her interest areas include strategic assessment, primary and secondary research, data analytics, and actionable insights to drive business performance and growth. Connect with her on [LinkedIn](#).



Elaine Mathis, Ph.D. is IAAPA's Senior Research Analyst, where she helps IAAPA members leverage research to improve their businesses and explore consumer personalization through co-creation and the experience economy. Connect with her on [LinkedIn](#).



Access the full report and previous reports at <https://www.iaapa.org/research>. Be on the lookout to participate in the Q2 2025 survey in early April!



Navigating the Conversational AI Landscape

A guide to choosing the right platform

IN TODAY'S DIGITAL-FIRST WORLD, the way attractions engage with potential guests is rapidly evolving with conversational artificial intelligence (AI) at the forefront of the transformation. When website visitors open a page looking for operating hours, tickets, or season pass options, they usually click through multiple pages. With conversational AI, a friendly chat window pops up on a user's screen, allowing potential guests to engage in a natural conversation, all with the goal of providing them with answers instantly.

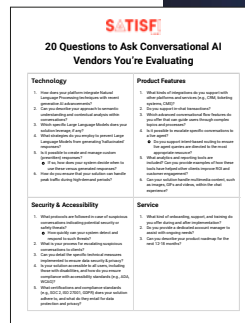
With 80% of customers now valuing their user experience just as much as a product itself, implementing an effective conversational AI solution can be a game-changer for an attraction. These advanced systems are powered by natural language processing (NLP) and large language models (LLM). Both are arms of AI that allows computers to interpret, understand, and manipulate human language. Both NLPs and LLMs go far beyond simple chatbots. They can handle complex tasks, conduct nuanced conversations, and seamlessly escalate to human support when needed.

The impact on an attraction can be profound—handling up to 95% of routine inquiries automatically and potentially improving purchase rates by 100 times. An NLP and LLM chatbot can also foster brand loyalty with its engaging interactions, all while mining valuable business insights from guest conversations.

When selecting the right conversational AI platform, decision makers at attractions should focus on four key pillars: technology, trust, features, and service.

The technology aspect is crucial. An attraction's marketing team needs to understand how the AI integrates NLP with recent generative AI advancements, along with its approach to understanding and comprehending strategies to prevent “hallucinated” responses. These are responses generated by a model that are false or misleading.

Trust is equally important, with 77% of business leaders expressing concerns about AI data issues—especially when it comes to meeting the gold standard of measures: the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) European Union law and SOC2, a cybersecurity compliance framework that guides an organization's protection of client data.




Download “20 Questions to ask Conversational AI Vendors You're Evaluating”

Attractions need to look for vendors who prioritize data protection and inclusivity. They also should ask potential tech partners about security measures and compliance standards.

Feature-wise, attractions should consider how the platform integrates with its existing systems, the ability to handle multimedia content, and conversational flow features. Lastly, evaluate the level of service and support a vendor offers—a dedicated account manager and comprehensive training can make a world of difference in an attraction's AI implementation journey.

Attractions should source an AI solution that not only meets their current needs, but can also grow and adapt as an attraction grows, whether that be offering upgrades like behind-the-scenes tours, dining reservations, or lodging.

The right conversational AI platform has the power to revolutionize an attraction's customer engagement strategy, while streamlining operations and providing invaluable insights and data. 



Dan Flores is head of tourism at Satisfi Labs, an AI partner of IAAPA. This column is printed in partnership with Satisfi Labs to empower attractions to discover new techniques to grow their business. Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#):



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Here are some fun ways to enhance your attractions, increase dwell time, and increase repeat visits to your venue:



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IAAPA Expo 2024 Sets New Records



Make plans to attend IAAPA Expo 2025 at the Orange County Convention Center, Nov. 17-21. Learn more at [IAAPA.org/Expos](https://iaapa.org/Expos)

More professionals than ever before visited IAAPA Expo at the Orange County Convention Center in 2024. The largest gathering for specialists in the global attractions industry attracted 37,066 attendees to Orlando, Nov. 18-22.

“IAAPA Expo is the industry’s largest must-attend event,” says Michael Shelton, vice president and executive director of IAAPA North America. “From networking and attending informative EDUSessions to sourcing the latest products and connecting with buyers, this is the place where professionals come to grow their business and their career.”

Expanded offerings in the North Concourse in 2024 included several new pavilions. The Haunting Grounds, a dedicated exhibit space for Halloween products, featured a haunted house, created to showcase products in an environment like where operators would install them. Meanwhile, the Street Market allowed food and beverage exhibitors to showcase trends and provide samples all in the same space.

“Our new pavilions allowed decision makers to see products in their native environments, while providing exhibitors the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations,” says Christy Spahn, vice president of expo sales and operations for IAAPA.

In addition, the inaugural Women in the Industry Networking Lunch provided a forum for dialogue and highlighted progress in the industry.

“As our members continue to innovate, so do we at IAAPA. These new offerings are wonderful examples of how IAAPA listens and responds to our members’ needs,” says Jakob Wahl, president and CEO of IAAPA. “Our team is already working on surpassing expectations for IAAPA Expo 2025, which will again be the greatest week of the year for our attendees.”

BY THE NUMBERS



565,875
Sq. Ft. of Show Floor Space



\$160,000
Total Raised and Matched for the IAAPA Foundation



37,066
Verified Attendees



27,000
Qualified Buyers



20,000
Buying Companies



1,123
Exhibiting Companies:
212 First Time
163 Global



408
Exhibitors taking the Sustainability Pledge



365
Speakers



140
Learning Opportunities



114
Countries Represented



31
Networking Events



30
Press Conferences



3
Evening Drone Shows



1
Remarkable IAAPA Hall of Fame Gala



IAAPA Inducts Four Leaders into the Hall of Fame

Monday evening of IAAPA Expo shined bright, as the Orange County Convention Center transformed into an awards gala. LEGENDS: A Hall of Fame Celebratory Affair honored four trailblazers during a new induction ceremony. Guests walked the blue carpet, perused silent auction items that benefited the IAAPA Foundation, networked, and enjoyed dinner at the formal event that inducted four new members to the IAAPA Hall of Fame.

Established in 1990, the IAAPA Hall of Fame Award honors pioneers for their significant contributions to the growth and development of the global attractions industry.

Here is a look at the four industry leaders honored at IAAPA Expo during the new event appearing in alphabetical order:



Dick Chance, following his college graduation in 1970, joined Chance Rides, the company founded by his father, Harold Chance, in 1961. After purchasing the company in 1985, Chance took over as CEO, leading the business through significant growth, including the expansion of its product line to feature carousels and roller coasters. A dedicated industry leader, Dick served as president of AREA, now AIMS International, and led the Showmen's League of America in 2000. His contributions have left a lasting impact on the amusement industry.

"It was a big surprise; a big honor. I've followed in my father's footsteps," Chance says. Harold was inducted into the IAAPA Hall of Fame in 1991. Chance says he plans to place his award next to his father's that's on display inside the Chance Rides office.

Geoff Chutter, founder and CEO of WhiteWater West, revolutionized the water park industry with his vision and determination. In 1980, he opened a water park in British Columbia, Canada, building the slides himself. Under his leadership, WhiteWater transformed into a global one-stop shop for water park needs, growing to seven regional offices and 500 employees. Through strategic acquisitions, innovation, and a commitment to safety, WhiteWater now delivers world-class water slides, aquatic play, and more, with over 5,000 projects for leading entertainment brands worldwide.

"It's totally overwhelming. I am filled with humility, particularly for those who have gone before me—and those who were on the stage with me," says Chutter. He also expressed how impressed he is with

how IAAPA has become a truly international organization, referencing the inaugural IAAPA Expo Middle East, taking place in March 2026 in Abu Dhabi, U.A.E.

Rick Hunter, a 40-year veteran in the industry, continues to drive innovation, share expertise, and uphold a legacy of excellence. Throughout his career, he has pushed boundaries and set new industry standards—from the early creation of the groundbreaking slides and bowls. Rick's global influence on water parks spans countless distinctive designs and cutting-edge solutions that have not only revolutionized the guest experience, but have also introduced efficient, sustainable innovations that significantly reduce the environmental footprint of water slides.

"It's totally humbling. I couldn't be happier being in the company of such great people in our industry," says Hunter while accepting his award. He continues, "It makes me want to work harder."

J. Clark Robinson, former president and CEO of IAAPA, played a pivotal role in shaping the future of the organization. Before assuming the role of president and CEO in 2002, Clark dedicated more than 27 years of his life to IAAPA in various volunteer leadership positions, including but not limited to treasurer, third, second, first vice chair, and chair of the board of directors. His leadership was instrumental in key milestones such as IAAPA's relocation from Chicago to Washington, D.C., the enhancement of its governance and committee structures, and the expansion of its global membership. Robinson's outstanding contributions to IAAPA, its members, and Lagoon Park make



UPPER LEFT: Rick Hunter's table breaks out in applause as he is called to stage. UPPER RIGHT: New inductee Dick Chance embraces Madison Kenyon (left) and Cindy Emerick (right). MIDDLE LEFT: Geoff Chutter and Rick Hunter link hands and raise their arm on stage as Greg Hale and Bob Rodgers look on. MIDDLE CENTER: Geoff Chutter accepts his award on stage. MIDDLE RIGHT: Eric Robinson accepts the IAAPA Hall of Fame Award on behalf of his late father, J. Clark Robinson. BOTTOM LEFT: Rick Hunter performs one of his signature cartwheels on stage. BOTTOM MIDDLE: Dick Chance receives his award from IAAPA Hall of Fame Task Force Chairman John McReynolds.


him a truly deserving inductee into the IAAPA Hall of Fame.

"It is a huge honor to accept this award on behalf of my father. He spent his whole life in the amusement park business," says Eric Robinson, son of the late J. Clark Robinson. "One of the great joys of his life was the association he had with the IAAPA community. He would be very grateful to receive this award and this acknowledgement."

"We could not be more thrilled with this year's Hall of Fame inductees," says John McReynolds, chairman of the IAAPA Hall of Fame judging task force. "These four individuals truly represent

more than 100 years of influence and imagination that has resonated throughout our industry."

The new gala received critical acclaim from previous inductees to the IAAPA Hall of Fame.

"The main event celebrated the legacy of the past achievers on whose shoulders we all stand. But the fund-raising effort looked forward, to the development of the future achievers who are today students and young professionals. And, of course all this is being orchestrated by today's leaders," says Bob Rogers, a 2010 IAAPA Hall of Fame Inductee who attended the LEGENDS event. "Achievers of the past and present, passing wisdom, legacy and encouragement to the achievers of the future—brilliant." 

 | HONORS

Rust, Germany, April 28-30, 2025

IAAPA Honors 2025, at Europa-Park in Rust, Germany, will celebrate and honor the 2024 IAAPA Brass Ring Excellence Awards winners and the winners of the regional inspiration, service, and young professional awards. Attendees will gain exclusive insights from industry leaders and participate in exclusive EDUTours of Europa-Park's cutting-edge technologies and operational practices. Learn more and register to attend:



Exploring What's New at IAAPA Expo

by Avery Matteo, Mike Costello, and Scott Fais

IAAPA EXPO IS WHERE NEWS IS MADE. From the debut of ride vehicles to manufacturers and suppliers positioning themselves for growth, the Funworld team covers the IAAPA Expo 2024 trade show floor in a new way: with video reports posted directly to YouTube. Thousands have watched as industry professionals share their innovations in their own voice. Here's a sample of the product announcements and conversations available on IAAPA's YouTube channel: youtube.com/IAAPAHQ



Premier Rides and Canada's Wonderland Debut Alpen Fury Train

Chuck Myers, Six Flags senior vice president of creative, shares the innovation at work inside AlpenFury, coming to Canada's Wonderland in 2025.



Zamperla Debuts New Family Coaster

Adam Sandy, marketing director of Zamperla, shares how Parc Spirou will broaden its family park offerings with the new Naruto-themed family launch coaster set to open in 2026.



ProSlide Shares New Slide Complexes Headed to Zoombezi Bay and Chimelong

ProSlide announces fresh details of a new water slide concept coming to Zoombezi Bay in Columbus, Ohio, and a Chimelong park in China.



Mack Rides and SeaWorld Orlando Speak About New-For-2025 Ride

Conner Carr shares the excitement of SeaWorld Orlando's new Mack Rides attraction opening in 2025.



Extreme Engineering Becomes Extreme Legacy

Phil Wilson explains Extreme Engineering's transition to Extreme Legacy and the future of the company.



Triotech Collaborates with SEVEN

Ernest Yale, president and CEO of Triotech, and Damien Latham, chief attractions officer of SEVEN, share news of family-friendly, adaptable dark ride attractions.



Merlin Adds Minecraft Park Attractions

Go inside Merlin Entertainment's blockbuster deal with Microsoft's Minecraft game. Funworld shares new details regarding a Minecraft attraction in the U.S. and a second in the U.K. that will open in 2026 and 2027.



Vekoma announces new roller coaster at Nuevo Vallarta

Ricardo Tonding Etges, vice president of sales and marketing at Vekoma, unveils the lead car of the new Tecauni Beast roller coaster, announced as a part of the new BON theme park in Nuevo Vallarta.



VidantaWorld Details Unveiled

Joel Bergeron, director of creation, shares details about the new BON—an all-generations luxury theme park in Nuevo Vallarta—and its attractions, entertainment, and immersion with nature.

Subscribe to IAAPA's YouTube Channel.



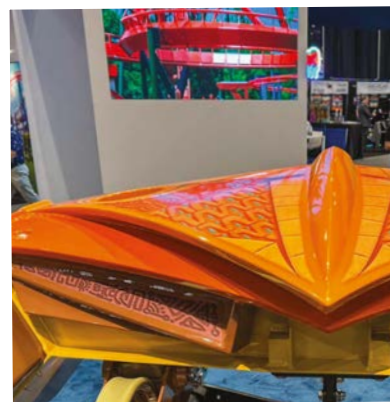
Hersheypark and S&S Debut Twisted Gravity Swing

Watch as Hersheypark's Jeremy Underkoffler and S&S Worldwide unveil one of the massive ride cars for the Twizzlers Twisted Gravity attraction—projected to be one of the tallest Screamin' Swings in the world.



DOF Robotics Shares What's New

DOF's President of North America, Sam Rhodes, shares the company's new Angry Birds motion simulator, along with a series of openings and ambitious upcoming projects, including DOF's recently-debuted flying theater in Guadalajara, Mexico.





WhiteWater Shares Trends in Water Slides

From new slide concepts to sustainability, WhiteWater's Una DeBoer and Doug Smith share the latest trends in water slides, surf pools, and flumes.



Polin Waterparks Shares What's Next

Polin Waterparks Director of Marketing, Şöhret Pakış, shared several of Poln's projects in the works for 2025.



Valo Motion Announces New Products

Valo Motion, a company known for creating big fun in small spaces, offers operators a turnkey solution when converting retail space. Learn more from Eldad Givon and Raine Kajastila.



Arcade Matt Presents His New Game from LAI Games

"Arcade" Matt Magnone of YouTube fame shows his new game, named Arcade Matt's Mount Shabang. Arcade Matt partnered with LAI Games for the new coin push game.



L3DFX and Escapology Team Up for Immersive Experiences

L3DFX shares the secret to a layered experience with deep storytelling while Escapology hints at what's next. Learn more from Paul Ciesiun and Burton Heiss.



SBF Visa and Rides 4 U Presents Zero Gravity

Len Soled, president of Rides 4-U, shares more about the company's reboot of the classic Rotor ride that is enhanced with translucent walls.



B&M's New Rapterra at Kings Dominion

Six Flags' Paul Bonifield details the design and story of the new Rapterra launched wing coaster, coming to Kings Dominion in 2025 from Bolliger & Mabillard.



Alterface Shares Insight on New Projects at IAAPA Expo 2024

Laurence Beckers and Etienne Sainton from Alterface share details on new dark ride projects the company has in the pipeline.



Ellis & Associates Share How New Tech Will Save Lives

Benjamin Strong, chief operating officer of Ellis, and Patrick Morandi, CEO of Roaring Springs Water Park, share how EA is preparing for the release of its Ellis Aquatic Vigilance System (EAVS), a new system that records incidents and provides crucial data.



Inside Sky Elements Record Breaking Drone Show

The "digital stars" shined bright as Sky Elements set a new Guinness World Record for the largest bird formation ever made. Rick Boss shares how Sky Elements pulled off the amazing feat.

IAAPA Meetup at Knott's Scary Farm: Behind the Scares


"CAN YOU HEAR THAT? The spider-possessed residents of the convalescent home are preparing a special place for you. Enter their web and succumb to their dark desires," says a creepy voice.

On Oct. 15, IAAPA North America hosted the final IAAPA Meetup of 2024 at Southern California's longest running Halloween theme park event, Knott's Scary Farm. The event was a combination of delicious food, a premier panel of creators behind one of the scariest mazes at the park, and a lights-on tour of the inner workings of the Widows mazes.

The creative team behind the Widows maze described how they conceptualized, designed, and built the haunted walk-through. The creators explained how Widows came to be, the story behind its inception, and even how dedicated the scare actors are in each of the mazes.

Creative designer Daniel Miller spoke about walking outside on a dewy, foggy morning and seeing black widow webs outside

of his house, creating the inspiration for the maze. Project specialist and entertainment assistant producer Maria "Pasta" Rago spoke about the creativity behind the story of Widows and the effort that goes into conceptualizing the roles of each scare actor in the house—where each scare actor has a unique backstory, often created by the scare actors themselves, who make their roles as entertaining as possible.

Rago also shared insight about the dedication of the fans of Knott's—highlighting that fans have created their own Reddit thread to talk about the creative, delicious, and jaw-dropping things they can find during the Knott's Scary Farm season. Before the panel, the group was able to experience the Widows maze as a regular park guest would, and after the conclusion of the panel, attendees received a behind-the-scenes tour with the lights on to see all the inner workings and unique design that went into building the scare. 



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FEC Owners Set to Learn and Grow in the Big Easy at FEC Summit 2025

ATTENDEES CAN EXPECT TO WORK HARD and play hard at IAAPA FEC Summit 2025, in New Orleans from Jan. 19–21. This year's event promises an array of enriching experiences and offerings designed to inspire and educate family entertainment professionals, ranging from experienced operators to industry newcomers. "We're thrilled for what's in store for attendees at FEC Summit 2025," shares IAAPA Director of Education and Membership Sean Bonner. "In partnership with IAAPA North America's FEC Committee, we're building a program to give operators the tools and resources they need to stand out among the competition."

A Kickoff with Southern Charm

The summit begins with a welcome reception sponsored by McGowan Allied Specialty Insurance, where attendees will be immersed in the flavor and vibrancy of New Orleans. The evening will be filled with lively jazz music that captures the essence of the Big Easy, providing an excellent opportunity for networking. Participants can forge valuable connections in a relaxed atmosphere while indulging in delicious Southern fare. It's the perfect way to embrace the spirit of the event. *Laissez les bons temps rouler*—let the good times roll!

Learning and Connections

The next day kicks off early with registration, followed by a complimentary breakfast sponsored by J&J Snack Foods. The general session will feature opening remarks and a keynote presentation by author Gerry O'Brien, who will share insights on how to become the No. 1 choice in a crowded market.

A highlight of FEC Summit will be an interactive panel session featuring operators sharing their experiences and strategies for success. These discussions will address crucial challenges, such as competition and profitability. Following



the panel, participants will have a unique opportunity to engage in structured roundtable discussions, diving deeper into the most important issues facing family entertainment professionals.

Immersive Educational Tours

Attendees will embark on exclusive behind-the-scenes visits to renowned FECs and other dynamic attractions in New Orleans, including NOLA Motorsports and Game On Social Hub (see page 52). These tours promise to provide firsthand insights into innovative operations and attractions, enhancing attendees' understanding of the industry landscape.

Reflection and Networking

The summit concludes with another round of engaging activities, including breakfast, panel discussions, and educational sessions. The farewell reception offers a time for attendees to reflect on the knowledge gained and connections made throughout the summit. This informal gathering provides a final opportunity to discuss key takeaways and strategies to implement in their own facilities.

As the day winds down, participants can unwind at a networking reception sponsored by Roller. Here, they will share insights, celebrate new relationships, and brainstorm exciting ideas for the future.

IAAPA FEC Summit 2025 promises to be a remarkable gathering of industry professionals, offering a blend of education, networking, and New Orleans charm. With carefully curated sessions led by industry experts, engaging discussions, and immersive experiences, attendees will leave equipped with valuable knowledge and inspiration to elevate their businesses in an increasingly competitive landscape. **FW**

Registration for IAAPA FEC Summit in New Orleans is now open. Visit [IAAPA.org/FECsummit](https://iaapa.org/FECsummit) or scan the QR code:



Thank you, IAAPA FEC Summit 2025 Sponsors!

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► For more information about IAAPA sponsorship opportunities, visit IAAPA.org/IAAPA-Sponsorship

Discover the Future of Entertainment at IAAPA Middle East Summit 2025

IAAPA MIDDLE EAST SUMMIT 2025, taking place from Feb. 17-19 in the heart of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, is an opportunity for professionals in the entertainment industry to experience the region's groundbreaking projects, emerging innovations, and exclusive insights into future developments. With a lineup of behind-the-scenes EDUTours, EDUSessions, and networking opportunities, the summit offers attendees access to the most ambitious entertainment projects currently under construction in Saudi Arabia.

"I am excited to bring the Middle East Trade Summit back to its place of origin: Riyadh in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. After two successful editions in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, we expect the biggest trade summit in history, which will be a great last step toward our new IAAPA Expo Middle East in 2026," says Peter van der Schans, executive director and vice president of IAAPA EMEA. "In addition to many booths and an extensive education program, I am also thrilled to give our members an opportunity to see the construction of Qiddiya City a few months before the opening."

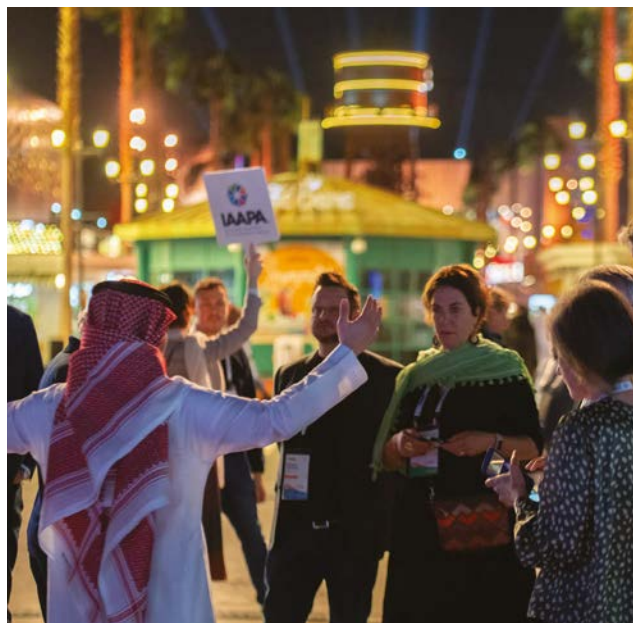
Exclusive Access to Saudi Arabia's New Projects

One of the most exciting aspects of the IAAPA Middle East Summit 2025 is the chance to visit some of Saudi Arabia's most highly anticipated entertainment destinations—all of which are still in development and inaccessible to the public. Attendees will get a first look at Six Flags Qiddiya City, a revolutionary theme park that is set to be a global leader in immersive entertainment. This flagship project features six themed lands and 28 rides and attractions. Six Flags Qiddiya construction began in 2019 and has generated immense excitement in the global entertainment community. This exclusive tour provides attendees with a unique opportunity to hear directly from the park's management about their operational plans and vision for the future.

In addition, the summit will offer a behind-the-scenes tour of Aquarabia Qiddiya City, Saudi Arabia's first water park. Divided into eight themed zones with 22 rides and five record-breaking attractions, Aquarabia is set to redefine water park experiences in the Middle East. These tours will provide attendees with invaluable insights into how these world-class attractions plan to break records and deliver extraordinary guest experiences.

EDUTours and Government-Supported Attractions

Beyond Qiddiya City, attendees will explore some of Riyadh's most impressive attractions, including properties such as Riyadh Boulevard World and Boulevard Riyadh City. These exclusive EDUTours, funded by the General Entertainment Authority (GEA), will offer insights into the new developments in areas themed



after Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Türkiye. The diversity of entertainment offerings and culinary experiences available in these locations showcases the country's growing focus on becoming a global entertainment hub.

Innovative Education and Industry Insights

IAAPA Middle East Summit 2025 is not just about exclusive site visits; it also delivers a robust education program designed to equip attendees with actionable insights. Key topics will include recruiting and training young talent, supplier selection processes, the significance of animation in show design, IP management, and best practices in safety protocols. Industry leaders from the Middle East and beyond will share their expertise, offering attendees the knowledge they need to thrive in a fast-growing market.

With around 70 companies showcasing their latest products and services for the entertainment industry at the event, the summit also offers a prime opportunity for attendees to connect with suppliers and discover new technologies that can elevate their operations.

IAAPA Middle East Summit 2025 represents IAAPA's continued commitment to the region's booming entertainment industry. Following the opening of an IAAPA office in Dubai last year and the success of previous Middle East summits, this event is part of IAAPA's broader strategy to support the growth of entertainment across the region. Attendees can look forward to the newly announced IAAPA Expo Middle East in 2026, further cementing IAAPA's role as a key partner in the region's attraction expansions. **FW**

Don't miss this exclusive opportunity to explore the future of entertainment in Saudi Arabia. Secure your spot at the IAAPA Middle East Summit 2025 and be part of a transformative event that will shape the region's next era of entertainment:





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For over 60 years, we have manufactured innovative, immersive and award-winning attractions for FECs around the world. Unsurpassed technology is built into all of our products to maximize efficiency, safety, and profit without compromising unique and thrilling experiences for your customers!



Explore Mexico's Vibrant Attractions at IAAPA Summit: Latin America, Caribbean



JOIN IAAPA IN EXPERIENCING MEXICO's premier attractions at IAAPA Summit: Latin America, Caribbean 2025. The event is set to provide an enriching and educational experience for attractions professionals in Mexico City from March 24–26. The three-day event will feature insightful EDUSessions, networking opportunities, and exclusive behind-the-scenes tours.

Day 1: March 24

The first day begins with a series of EDUSessions and trade connections at the Presidente InterContinental Mexico City Hotel and Aztlán Parque Urbano. Attendees can look forward to engaging talks from international speakers on crucial industry topics, such as enhancing customer experiences, innovative staffing solutions, and the role of AI in leadership development. These sessions are designed to build essential skills for professionals in the attractions industry.

In the evening, attendees will visit Hasbro City, Latin America's first multi-branded Hasbro-themed family entertainment center (FEC). This exclusive experience includes a backstage tour and a VIP dinner, allowing participants to immerse themselves in interactive experiences based on popular Hasbro brands like Transformers, Monopoly, and Nerf.

Day 2: March 25

Continuing the theme of trade connections and educational sessions, Day 2 provides opportunities to strengthen business alliances and explore current trends and challenges. Topics will include supporting young professionals, sustaining brand value, navigating food and beverage trends, and leveraging technology for revenue growth.

To close the day, attendees will be treated to a vibrant Mexican Fiesta at Aztlán Parque Urbano, a new amusement park that combines modern attractions with nostalgic elements. Highlights include an 85-meter Ferris wheel and a two-story, hand-painted carousel, capturing the essence of Mexican culture.

Day 3: March 26

On the final day, attendees will embark on an EDUTour in Mexico City, visiting two unique venues: Kinezis and Acuario Michin. At Kinezis, a new concept by KidZania, participants will explore fitness and wellness activities in a fun, adventure-based environment. Following this, they'll visit Acuario Michin, the largest aquarium in Latin America, offering interactive experiences and an extensive collection of marine life.

Optional Post Tour: March 27-28

For those looking to extend their experience, optional tours on March 27 and 28 will explore additional entertainment facilities in Morelos and Puebla, including the floral wonderland Jardines de México, El Rollo water park, Inflalandia Quack Puebla, and the Africam Safari wildlife park, complete with exclusive animal encounters and networking lunches. **FW**

Learn more and register for IAAPA Summit: Latin America, Caribbean 2025, March 24-26 in Mexico City. Visit IAAPA.org/LACSummit or scan the QR code below.





IAAPA SUMMIT:

LATIN AMERICA, CARIBBEAN 2025

MEXICO CITY | MARCH 24-26

POST TOUR | MARCH 27-28

MORELOS AND PUEBLA



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the attractions industry
in the region**



Unlock the Value of IAAPA Membership

IN 2025, AS THE GLOBAL LEADER IN THE ATTRACTIONS INDUSTRY, IAAPA offers a robust suite of membership benefits tailored to professionals, companies, and organizations.

Membership Options

IAAPA caters to the varied needs of industry stakeholders and offers three membership categories:

- **Attraction Facilities:** Designed for amusement parks, water parks, entertainment centers, museums, zoos, natural attractions, resorts, and more, this membership provides comprehensive coverage for entire facilities, irrespective of size.
- **Manufacturer/Supplier/Consultant:** Tailored for companies engaged in manufacturing, supplying, or consulting within the attractions sector, this membership extends across the entire organizational spectrum.
- **Individual:** Crafted for professionals operating within the attractions industry, this membership offers tailored categories catering to diverse career stages, including young professionals, retirees, educators, and students.

Member Benefits

IAAPA membership affords unparalleled advantages aimed at driving strategic growth and fostering professional development.

News and Publications

- **Funworld Magazine:** Gain access to the industry's preeminent source of information, covering trends, innovations, and best practices, delivered in print and digital formats.
- **IAAPA News Daily:** Stay informed with exclusive e-newsletters, delivering timely updates and insights from across the global attractions landscape.
- **IAAPA.org Access:** Seamlessly navigate industry news, event information, educational resources, and regional updates via IAAPA.org, the association's centralized online platform.

Connections

- **Expos and Events:** Experience premier networking, innovation, and knowledge-sharing opportunities at IAAPA's flagship events, where members enjoy exclusive perks and savings on registration fees, exhibit spaces, and event tickets.
- **IAAPA Regional Events:** Network with industry peers and stakeholders at discounted rates through a comprehensive calendar of regional networking events.
- **IAAPA Connect+:** Enhance your event experience with an interactive platform providing easy access to schedules, exhibitor information, wayfinding tools, and the chance to connect with fellow attendees.
- **IAAPA Connect+ Marketplace:** Access a virtual hub for year-round networking and business opportunities, connecting buyers and sellers across the globe.
- **IAAPA Job Board:** Source top talent and explore career opportunities within the global attractions industry through IAAPA's dedicated job board.

Research and Resources

- **Reports and Industry Data:** Tap into the premier source of global attractions research. Explore operational benchmark reports, regional economic impact studies, quarterly outlook surveys, and an annual global theme and amusement park outlook study.
- **Crisis Communications Support:** Ensure your organization is ready for a crisis. Download IAAPA's Crisis Communications Template from the IAAPA Bookstore. In a crisis, call the 24/7 support line: +1 321-319-7602.
- **Business Solutions Partnership Program:** Provides the resources and support to create new and proven revenue streams, reduce costs, and optimize operational efficiencies.
- **Hosted Buyer Program:** Meet with a wide range of IAAPA Expo exhibitors to learn about new products and trends, network with leaders, and stay up to date with the latest industry developments.

Education


- **Certification Programs:** Elevate professional credentials with esteemed certification programs, including the IAAPA Certified Attractions Professional (ICAP) and IAAPA Certified Attractions Executive (ICAE) designations.
- **Webinars, Webcasts, and Online Learning:** Engage in monthly live webinars, archived sessions, and online learning resources covering industry-specific topics, which are available in multiple languages.

Safety Standards and Training

- **Facility Excellence Self-Assessment:** Leverage IAAPA's safety tool to measure progress and assess the health of safety procedures.
- **Safety Guidance:** Prioritize safety and compliance with IAAPA's global efforts to establish industry-leading safety standards and comprehensive training initiatives.

Public Affairs

- **Industry Advocacy:** Benefit from IAAPA's advocacy efforts aimed at shaping industry regulations and legislation to ensure a conducive business environment for attractions professionals worldwide.

IAAPA membership serves as a catalyst for professional growth and industry advancement, offering a wealth of benefits tailored to meet the diverse needs of attractions professionals worldwide. Join IAAPA today and unlock the full spectrum of advantages poised to elevate success within the global attractions industry. Visit [IAAPA.org](https://iaapa.org) to learn more. 

New Accessibility Whitepapers Available for IAAPA Members

IAAPA Europe, Middle East, and Africa (EMEA) has published two new whitepapers designed to elevate accessibility within the attractions industry. These resources, titled “A Practical Guide to Improve Accessibility in the Attractions Industry” and “Ride Accessibility Research Paper,” represent two years of collaborative work by an expert group of IAAPA EMEA members.

Both papers provide essential insights for operators, designers, and manufacturers, focusing on enhancing accessibility in amusement rides and attractions. The guidance covers a broad range of topics, including strategies for improving communication with guests with disabilities, adapting existing rides for better accessibility, and designing new attractions that accommodate a wider range of physical, cognitive, and sensory needs.

Practical Guidance for Operators

“A Practical Guide to Improve Accessibility in the Attractions Industry” offers advice to operators aiming to make their facilities more welcoming to guests with disabilities. The whitepaper provides a thorough introduction to common disabilities encountered among visitors and discusses their implications on the guest experience. This guide outlines communication strategies—both pre-visit and on-site—that operators can use to create a more inclusive atmosphere for all guests.

Additionally, the whitepaper provides practical advice on adjusting pricing policies, outlining the considerations needed to navigate common discount structures while maintaining fairness. It also explains the significance of understanding official documentation related to disabilities, particularly in the European Union.

To support operators in their efforts to improve accessibility, the whitepaper includes two useful templates: a checklist for assessing the services offered to guests with disabilities and a review guide to evaluate accessibility policies applied to existing rides.

Inclusive Design for Engineers and Designers

For engineers and designers, “Ride Accessibility Research Paper” delves into the concept of inclusive design, offering a comprehensive exploration of accessibility considerations for new amusement rides. This paper builds on the foundational information


provided in the practical guide, extending the discussion of inclusive design, and how it can be incorporated into company strategy. It highlights both common pitfalls and best practices for designing rides that accommodate a variety of abilities, ensuring that new attractions are created with accessibility as a priority.

The paper also underscores the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, presenting best practices for involving experts from different fields in the co-design process. The paper also features detailed examples of accessibility guidelines and requirements used by prominent ride manufacturers, such as Vekoma Rides and Mack Rides, making the document a valuable resource for companies aiming to implement inclusive design principles.

Risk Assessment and Operational Practices

Beyond design, the whitepapers provide essential information on risk assessment related to accessibility, addressing key considerations for cognitive and sensory needs. Operators and designers will also find guidance on evacuation procedures, with recommendations for ensuring that guests with disabilities can be safely accommodated in emergency situations. Best practices for incorporating these considerations into ride use and maintenance manuals are also included, giving operators the tools they need to manage accessibility from a holistic operational perspective.

A Commitment to Inclusivity

IAAPA is honored to offer these valuable resources to its members, reflecting the association’s ongoing commitment to advancing inclusivity within the global attractions industry. These whitepapers provide actionable insights and tools that will enable industry professionals to foster more accessible and welcoming environments for all guests. 



Members are encouraged to log in and download these comprehensive resources at [IAAPA.org/EMEA-Publications](https://iaapa.org/EMEA-Publications)



New Leaders Elected to IAAPA Global Board

EFFECTIVE DECEMBER 1, the following attractions individuals begun terms on the IAAPA Board of Directors. They include:

Christopher Perry, ICAE

Second Vice Chair, 2025-2028

Executive Director, Entertainment Strategy, Qiddiya Investment Company (Europe, Middle East, Africa region)

Perry has worked extensively in the Europe, Middle East, Africa (EMEA) region, held leadership roles within the Latin America, Caribbean (LAC), Asia-Pacific (APAC), and North America (NA) regions, giving him a comprehensive global perspective. He has held leadership roles at water parks, resorts, cruise lines, and as an industry supplier.



Mohamed Abdalla Al Zaabi

Facility Director, 2025-2027

Group CEO, Miral (Europe, Middle East, Africa region)

Al Zaabi has played a pivotal role in establishing Miral as a curator and developer of immersive attractions on Yas Island in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. He joined the company in 2015 and brings expertise in technology, construction, engineering, strategic planning, and investments to the IAAPA Global Board of Directors.



Andreas Andersen, ICAE

Treasurer, 2025-2027

CEO and President, Liseberg Group, (Europe, Middle East, Africa region)

Andersen brings two decades of experience in the attractions industry, as well as a master's degree in law and a postgraduate degree in accounting and business administration to the board of directors. His IAAPA involvement is far-reaching, previously serving as chairman in 2018, among multiple other roles.



Geoff Chutter Manufacturer/Supplier/ Consultant (MSC) Director, 2025-2027

Founder and CEO, WhiteWater West Industries (North America region)

Chutter is a long-standing supporter, sponsor, and advocate for IAAPA and the global attractions industry. He has attended every IAAPA Expo since 1982, and every IAAPA Expo Europe and IAAPA Expo Asia since their respective inceptions. Chutter was inducted to the IAAPA Hall of Fame in November 2024.



Omid Aminifard

Facility Director, 2025-2027

Chief Operating Officer/General Manager, Santa Cruz Seaside Company/Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, (North America region)


Aminifard's distinguished career in the attractions industry spans more than 30 years. He has held leadership positions at SeaWorld San Diego, multiple hotel and resort properties in Las Vegas, in addition to Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk.



Rene Aziz, ICAE

**Past Chair Director,
2025-2027**

CEO, Grupo Divertido, (Latin America, Caribbean region)

Aziz served as chairman of the IAAPA Board of Directors in 2000. His extensive industry knowledge—spanning more than four decades—and unique perspectives from the Latin America, Caribbean region will play a key role in his continued contributions. In addition to his vast IAAPA service, Aziz founded two industry associations in Latin America. 





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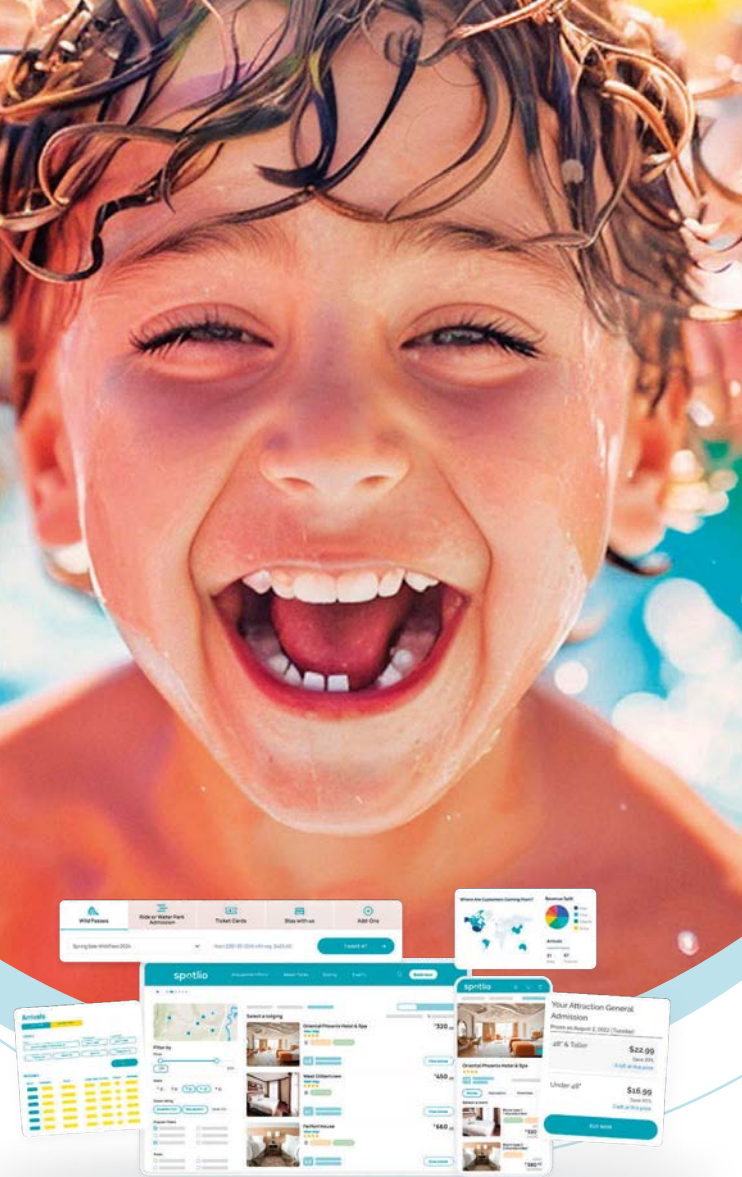
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This is a partial listing of upcoming IAAPA events. Event details are as of Dec. 10, 2024, and subject to change. For the most up-to-date information, visit [IAAPA.org/Events](https://iaapa.org/Events)

JANUARY



CES

7-10 | Las Vegas

IAAPA FEC Summit 2025

19-21 | New Orleans

IAAPA Forum: Zoos and Aquariums Latin America, Caribbean

29 | Online

FEBRUARY

IAAPA Presents: Germany

11 | Hamburg, Germany

IAAPA Institute for Attractions Professionals

16-17 | Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

IAAPA Middle East Trade Summit 2025

17-19 | Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

IAAPA Meetup: Punta Cana

18 | Punta Cana, Dominican Republic

IAAPA Water Park Forum

20 | Doha, Qatar

MARCH

IAAPA APAC Sustainability Forum

13-14 | Singapore

IAAPA Summit: Latin America, Caribbean 2025

24-26 | Mexico City

IAAPA North America Summit 2025

30 | Anaheim, California

APRIL



28-30 | Rust, Germany

JUNE



30-July 3 | Shanghai



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GAME ON IN THE BIG EASY

How an
independent
FEC beat the
odds—and
thrives

by Michael Costello

STANDING AS A CONSTANT TO ALL THOSE WHO ENTER, Bob—Game On Social Hub’s original mascot—proudly stands at the entrance of the New Orleans facility. His strategic placement is not only a nostalgic symbol of the family entertainment center’s (FEC) past, but also one of resilience. Bob has watched as Game On Social Hub has stayed ahead of the times through technological innovations.

Spanning 34,000 square feet, the FEC offers a balanced mix of activities, from augmented reality experiences to a two-story laser tag arena, bowling, axe throwing, and a high-tech arcade with more than 70 games. Complemented by a full-service restaurant, bar, and nearby party rooms, the facility serves as a versatile venue for family outings, corporate events, and private parties. Longtime local visitors to Game On (also fondly referred to as “the Hub”) have grown up with the FEC.

Game On Social Hub pulled back the veil of secrecy for Funworld, sharing how their layers of technology can inspire other independently owned facilities as they cater to multiple generations.

LURKING UNDER THE SURFACE While it may look quiet in this photo, Game On Social Hub is busy, with a robust network at work. All of the games seen here will automatically be powered down should the fire alarm go off. And then, there’s the cameras in the ceiling linked to a facial recognition system. Learn more on the innovations hiding in the background in the pages ahead.

"EVERYBODY THAT WE'VE BEEN HOSTING ALL THESE YEARS—KIDS' BIRTHDAY PARTIES—THEY KNOW US, AND THEY'VE GROWN UP WITH US."

— Ricky Dillard

GROWING PAINS

The beginnings of Game On Social Hub are rooted in a modest laser tag attraction with three party rooms and 20 arcade games that opened in 1985. Over the years, the business relocated to various locations, each time expanding its footprint and offerings. A rebranding in 2022 marked a significant transformation, introducing a sleeker and higher-tech laser tag arena, expanded arcade space, prize redemption, and a full-service restaurant. "For years, we were known for our laser tag operations and arcades. When we came here, this was a bigger building and we wanted to include the parents and older crowd," says Davor Franicevich, Game On owner and one of three partners.

The evolution of Game On is not just a story of expansion but also of adaptation. The original facility, a casualty of Hurricane Katrina, was followed by a new location in Baton Rouge, which thrived until the COVID-19 pandemic prompted its sale. (Ironically, the building was repurposed into an after-school center and theater, preserving its legacy of community service.)

Returning to the Metairie community just 20 minutes east of the famed Bourbon Street, the FEC faced another challenge when a landlord decided to replace the venue—with a grocery store. The move forced yet another strategic pivot: the creation of the current Game On, which now boasts 12 bowling lanes—complete with a VIP section—and four party rooms.

It's at this location that the team decided to introduce adult beverages. The addition of a bar reflects the company's growth in tandem with its clientele, many of whom have matured from children attending birthday parties to adults bringing their own families.

"Everybody that we've been hosting all these years—kids' birthday parties—they know us, and they've grown up with us," says Game On General Manager Ricky Dillard.

"This evolution underscores Game On's commitment to

providing a comprehensive entertainment experience. When I say, 'We grew up,' we put in a bar," says Dillard.

Game On's food and beverage offerings have extended guest visitation. A full-service restaurant is complimented by Quick Bites—a more "family-friendly" environment with counter service that serves adult beverages and snacks, such as milkshakes, cake, candies, and ice cream. At the bowling lanes, a Brunswick kiosk also handles food and beverage ordering.

Rounding out the experience and keeping the facility's commitment to offer activities for a large range of age groups (and taking advantage of Louisiana's video poker laws), Game On offers three machines of video poker in an adults-only room.

Yet, it's what guests don't see—the slew of technology—that powers the facility.

ENTER THE MATRIX

"What differentiates us from everybody else is we're all high-tech. Push button, automated, easy—but that requires a huge backbone behind the scenes," says Franicevich. This philosophy underscores the importance of a robust technological infrastructure that supports the user-friendly experiences at all levels that keep customers coming back.

One of the standout features of Game On is its custom-developed admissions system. Affectionately referred to as "the matrix," it is the in-house designed and

LEFT: Adults not inside the laser tag arena may participate in game play from a console.
RIGHT: Game On's flex space can host birthday parties to corporate events.



"WHAT DIFFERENTIATES US FROM EVERYBODY ELSE IS WE'RE ALL HIGH-TECH. PUSH BUTTON, AUTOMATED, EASY—BUT THAT REQUIRES A HUGE BACKBONE BEHIND THE SCENES"

— Davor Franicevich



GAME ON SOCIAL HUB



GAME ON SOCIAL HUB



MICHAEL COSTELLO

built integration of ticketing, laser tag play scheduling, and real time reporting—all accessible with handheld digital notebooks. By automating these processes, the Hub efficiently manages its operations, allowing for a rapid turnover of activities. The matrix enables the Hub to run six laser tag games every hour, accommodating up to 45 players every 10 minutes. This efficiency not only maximizes revenue but also enhances the overall guest experience.

IT manager Elias Basse emphasizes the hands-on approach necessary for maintaining Game On's advanced systems. "If it turns on or blinks, I pretty much touch it," he quips, highlighting the proactive culture that drives the organization. Maintenance and constant vigilance are the key to keeping everything operational.

ADVANCING LASER TAG

Laser tag is the anchor attraction of Game On, occupying approximately 4,500 square feet. This two-level space is designed to provide an immersive experience, drawing inspiration from the original Photon Alpha fields that revolutionized laser tag in the 1980s. The Hub has successfully modernized these elements, creating a unique environment that appeals to both nostalgic players and new enthusiasts. "When players that frequent their arena play elsewhere, they reference the Hub's arena as the 'real' laser tag arena," says Franicevich, owing its feel to the nostalgia and true sport originally envisioned by Photon and its creator, George Carter.

The arena features an observation deck, allowing parents to watch their children play. If parents want to be more involved in the game without actively participating in the laser tag play, Game On offers the ability for parents to swipe in and tag their kids remotely, via pod stations. This innovative approach allows families to participate together at different levels.

The tower set pieces encountered in the arena are a nostalgic hallmark of the original Photon arenas of Game On's early years.

IT manager Elias Basse demonstrates his in-house designed lighting, audio, and media control digital notebook.



GAME ON SOCIAL HUB

LEFT: Elements left over from the building's former retail tenant are barely recognizable in Game On Social Hub's eye-catching, sleek facade design. RIGHT: Bob, Game On's mascot robot, greets local children at their school.



MICHAEL COSTELLO



GAME ON SOCIAL HUB

The retained structures became integrated into every location the Hub called home over the years. This blend of nostalgia and innovation honors the past with the modern enhancement of back-lit LED pixel lighting within the towers' panels, directly interacting and changing with the gameplay.

To stay at the forefront of laser tag technology meant introducing Laserforce Gen 8 battle suits—the latest version features integrated screens and synchronized lighting effects that elevate gameplay. The team follows a systematic replacement cycle, transitioning to the latest generation after it is thoroughly tested. “We typically wait about a year for maturation to work out any kinks,”

explains Basse. This meticulous approach is complemented by hands-on engagement by visiting IAAPA Expo annually, where Besse arrives onsite with a list in hand to assess new technologies to identify potential failure points.

Basse is proud of the innovative custom solutions he developed for the FEC's laser tag, including charging the circuits of enhanced target systems that further distinguish the experience at Game On. “I tapped into the circuitry on the inside to control the electronics so I can light up the extra LEDs,” explains Basse. By tapping into the Hub's electronics expertise, the team has created unique features that enhance gameplay and operational efficiency.

Preventative maintenance is another critical aspect of the trio's operations. “Our key factor to everything is 100% functional, 100% of the time. Very rarely do we ever have anything that's down for longer than a week if we're waiting on parts,” says Dillard. With spare battle suits and a well-stocked inventory of parts, downtime is minimized to ensure the business remains profitable. “If it's not working, it ain't making money,” emphasizes Basse. This company cornerstone applies to all of its business equipment.

NURTURING INNOVATION

One of the standout innovations at Game On is their automated power management system. By integrating a programmable logic controller—originally designed for elevators and jack-up barges in the Gulf of Mexico—the team has created a system that powers up and shuts down all arcade games with the push of a button, sent via digital notebooks or the team's personal smartphones. This \$5,000 investment not only saves time, but also protects equipment from damage during power outages. The system ensures games remain off until power is stable, preventing costly damages power surges may cause the sensitive electronics. On a daily basis, the power management system saves time and money. The team says individually powering the electronics up or down would take more than a half hour.

Meanwhile, Game On Social Hub is built to operate 24/7, thanks to its robust internet infrastructure. With tertiary internet connections, including fiber and dual cellular backups, the Hub can maintain operations—even during outages from severe weather. With credit card use making up nearly 80% of their sales, a brief internet outage could result in significant financial losses. Yet, the Hub's infrastructure ensures continuity, allowing the attraction to weather disruptions without missing a beat. Because of Louisiana's high water table, all power lines must

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— Elias Basse

remain on utility poles, subjecting utility poles to car accidents or adverse weather conditions that could bring down power lines.

The Hub's commitment to innovation extends to its audiovisual systems. All television content is delivered via Ethernet, controlled by digital notebooks that allow staff to manage displays and signage throughout the building. The system, designed in-house, cost a fraction of the \$200,000 quoted by external vendors. It enables seamless integration of media across various zones, from bowling alleys to party rooms. The ability to customize and control branded content in-house not only reduces costs, but also can drive revenue with targeted marketing messages.

Graphic design is another area where Game On Social Hub excels. Dillard's wife, along with her assistant, are certified graphic designers that can quickly produce promotional materials and signage onsite, allowing the FEC to further reduce its reliance on external vendors. This in-house capability is what the team calls their "secret sauce" for keeping costs low and operations efficient.

SAFE PLAY

Safety is a top priority at Game On Social Hub, and their systems reflect this commitment. The power management system is integrated with the fire alarm, ensuring that all arcade games shut down in the event of an emergency. This feature, along with programmable sound systems that can broadcast emergency messages, enhances the safety of guests and staff alike.

The Hub is also exploring advanced security measures, including artificial intelligence and facial recognition technology. With a half-petabyte (a petabyte is equal to 1,000 terabytes) of storage dedicated to CCTV footage across 71 cameras, the Hub is experimenting with artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance security and identify individuals known to be wanted by law enforcement agencies. While these systems are costly, they

underscore the Hub's commitment to providing a safe and secure environment for all visitors. While many operators may balk at the high price tag for data storage, Basse says "We're a small operator that operates as a big one." This reflects Game On's ability to build and manage high tech operations with a lean team. This efficiency is crucial in an industry where customer satisfaction hinges on minimal downtime and quick service.

Despite being a single-location operator, Game On Social Hub operates with the sophistication of a large chain. Game On tells Funworld that guests often mistake the Hub for a corporate entity with multiple locations, and to the team, the sentiment is a testament to the professionalism and innovation that defines their facility. This is one team that continues to push the boundaries of what's possible, driven by a passion for innovation and excellence.

A CURATED GUEST EXPERIENCE

The Game On team is also proud of how they laid out the facility all in-house. Thoughtfully, they designed the facility's layout in CAD first and then decided on finishes that give the FEC a warm feel. Today's added touches are a departure from what the team describes as a warehouse aesthetic used in its former locations. The modern Hub features warm Edison bulb lighting and a variety of wall finishes that create an inviting atmosphere. The interior touches, crafted by Doug Wilkerson of Dynamic Designs, combines functionality with style, ensuring a visually appealing space.

The facility boasts custom furniture, including durable butcher block tables made by in-house carpenters, that enhances both the aesthetics and longevity. The four event rooms—split by dividers that allow the rooms to be combined or separated—are equipped with comfortable chairs, integrated audio technology, projectors, and microphones that allow for versatile use for birthday parties to corporate functions.

Game On Social Hub exemplifies how a commitment to technical innovation, creativity, meticulous maintenance, and in-house solutions can transform an attraction into a cutting-edge experience. As Franicevich and his team continue to push the boundaries of what is possible, Game On Social Hub can be looked to as a leader in the FEC space, driven by a passion for creating memories using engaging technology. 

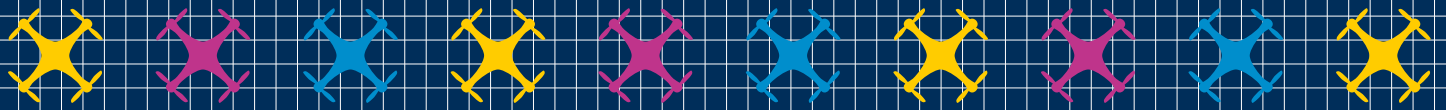
gameonsocialhub.com

At printing time, Game On Social Hub is scheduled to be a tour stop during IAAPA FEC Summit 2025. Registration for the event taking place Jan. 19-21, 2025, in New Orleans is now open. Visit IAAPA.org/FECSummit to register today.



Michael Costello is the managing editor of Funworld at IAAPA. With 20 years working in the attractions industry, he has also volunteered in his free time with the National Amusement Park Historical Association. Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#):

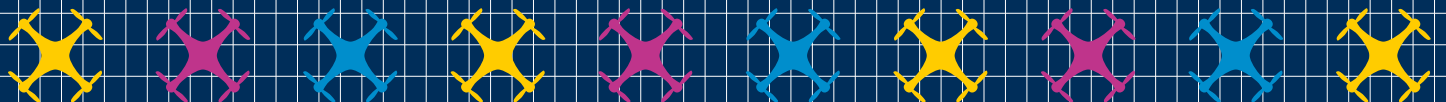


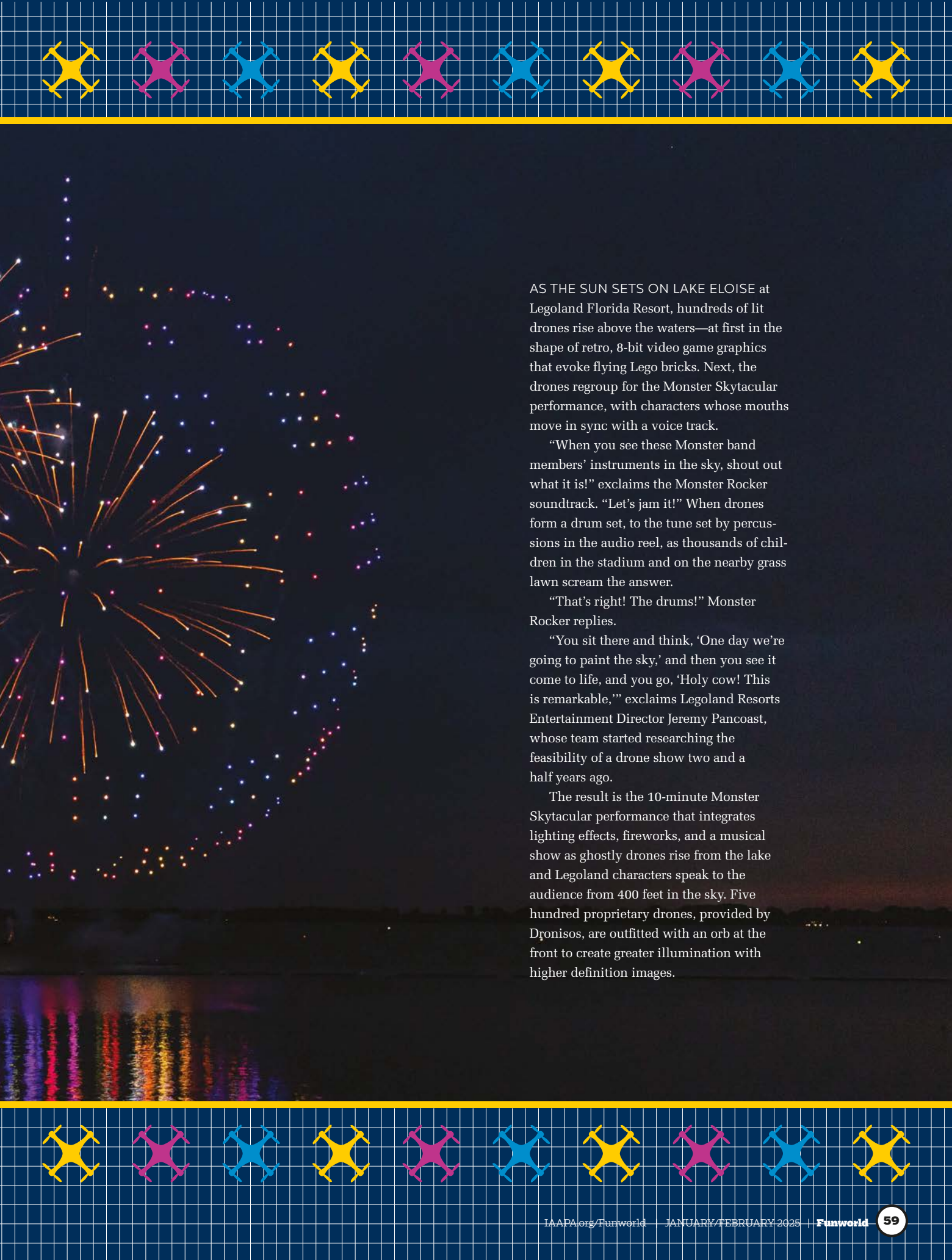


LIGHT UP THE SKY

How drone technology
elevates the art
of storytelling

by Michael Switow





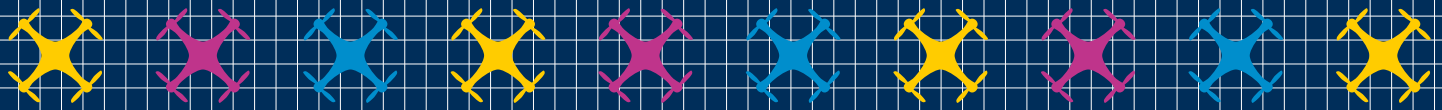
AS THE SUN SETS ON LAKE ELOISE at Legoland Florida Resort, hundreds of lit drones rise above the waters—at first in the shape of retro, 8-bit video game graphics that evoke flying Lego bricks. Next, the drones regroup for the Monster Skytacular performance, with characters whose mouths move in sync with a voice track.

“When you see these Monster band members’ instruments in the sky, shout out what it is!” exclaims the Monster Rocker soundtrack. “Let’s jam it!” When drones form a drum set, to the tune set by percussions in the audio reel, as thousands of children in the stadium and on the nearby grass lawn scream the answer.

“That’s right! The drums!” Monster Rocker replies.

“You sit there and think, ‘One day we’re going to paint the sky,’ and then you see it come to life, and you go, ‘Holy cow! This is remarkable,’” exclaims Legoland Resorts Entertainment Director Jeremy Pancoast, whose team started researching the feasibility of a drone show two and a half years ago.

The result is the 10-minute Monster Skytacular performance that integrates lighting effects, fireworks, and a musical show as ghostly drones rise from the lake and Legoland characters speak to the audience from 400 feet in the sky. Five hundred proprietary drones, provided by Dronisos, are outfitted with an orb at the front to create greater illumination with higher definition images.



Drones illuminate the night sky over Lake Eloise at Legoland Florida.

A NEW ERA OF STORYTELLING

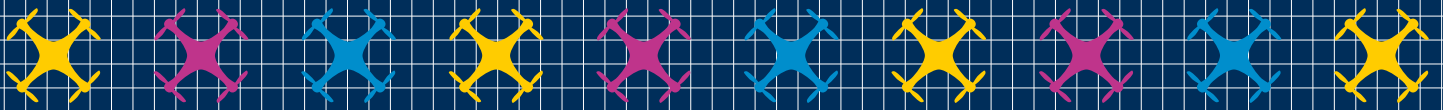
Drone shows, once a novelty, are becoming a dynamic force in theme park entertainment. They enable a degree of vibrant storytelling not possible with traditional fireworks. Consider a recent show at MetLife Stadium in the New York metro area, produced by Pixis Drones, to celebrate the New York Giants' 100th anniversary. A giant quarterback launches a pass that is caught by wide receiver Victor Cruz. Plays are brought to life at an epic scale, not only through visuals, but by syncing the drone formations to iconic sports broadcast calls. And when the real-life Cruz sees an image of himself in the sky celebrating a touchdown, he breaks into his signature salsa, thrilling fans in the stadium.

Initially viewed as a competitor to pyrotechnics, attractions increasingly consider drones and fireworks to be complementary.

"Where fireworks lacked in creating defined imagery in the sky, drones now fill that void. Where drones lack in extending the canvas or building on climatic moments of the show, fireworks are there to support," Pancost says. "As creators, we simply have another technology in our bag that allows us to diversify the emotions of the guest journey. Drones are another paintbrush in our artistry toolkit that allow us to diversify the emotions of the guest journey."

Yet, there will always be a place for pyro.

"Drones can handle the intricate storytelling or branding elements, while fireworks provide the high-energy finale or accent points," explains Pixel Sky Animations Chief Operating Officer Jeff Clarmo, who worked with fireworks for 30 years before becoming a drone specialist.



MERGING TECHNOLOGIES

While many shows now utilize both technologies, the nightly show at Chimelong's Ocean Kingdom in Zhuhai, China, takes the integration a step further. Since the park first opened a decade ago, the evening show around the lagoon is known as a spectacle for the senses, with futuristic fly-boarders, dancing fountains, lasers, and projection mapping. In the show's latest incarnation, a dolphin drone formation looks down on the lagoon's 200-foot-high whale shark monument, its head arched high in the air. The drone dolphin launches a string of fireworks from its nose. Moments later, the fireworks appear to impact the whale shark, triggering bursts of fireworks from the point of impact, as well as around the lake.

"Some operators now have the capability of deploying pyro from the drones themselves," observes Pixis Drones President Bernard Ozarowski. "If flying both together, make sure to fly the drones first so the smoke doesn't obscure the drone show," he cautions.

At Ocean Kingdom, Chimelong deploys 300 drones for the nightly show and more than 1,000 drones at a time during larger events, such as Chinese New Year.

Raymond Lin, who heads up entertainment for Chimelong's Zhuhai properties, appreciates the drones' versatility.

"Drones create beautiful patterns that impress people," he says. "And their pattern can be changed in a short period of time, which is different from other elements in the show."

Lin notes, though, the current drone technology can be impacted by sunspot activity and inclement weather like rain and wind. He looks forward to the day when drone designers can overcome these challenges so that the audience experience is consistently positive.



QUIET, VERSATILE AND ECO-FRIENDLY

While fireworks and music may add to a show's appeal, not every drone show needs to be produced with additional elements. The drones' silent nature can also be a selling point.

"Drones are effective in areas where repeated, frequent shows are desired," says Clarmo. "The lack of loud bangs means you can schedule more regular shows without upsetting nearby residents. This can also be a major plus for environments sensitive to noise or where pets, wildlife, or noise regulations are a concern."

"Drones are also less environmentally intrusive," he adds. "They don't release chemicals or produce debris like fireworks. This makes them more sustainable for repeat performances."

Beyond noise control, drones also make events more inclusive for guests who might find loud fireworks overwhelming.

"Drone light shows open up large group experiences to people, such as veterans with PTSD or folks who are neurodivergent, who would otherwise struggle to attend a fireworks show or loud communal gathering," adds Ozarowski.





A NEW ERA

While drones have become significantly less expensive in recent years, it is still more economical to work with experienced partners than to buy drones directly.



Michael Switow is a longtime Funworld writer, published author, and professional emcee based in Singapore. Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#).



“Not long ago, \$300 per drone was standard pricing,” says Clarmo. In the current market, while costs vary depending on the time of year and show duration, drone shows tend to cost about twice as much as fireworks.


“Off-the-shelf is great for the consumer market,” observes Pancoast, “but not for a major theme park operation, where there are numerous risks and variables. There’s a level of safety and a level of vetting that goes beyond what most people anticipate when they first want to do a drone show.”

He advises operators understand what software, technology, encryption levels, geo-fields, and risk mitigation is needed when choosing a partner to launch drone shows.

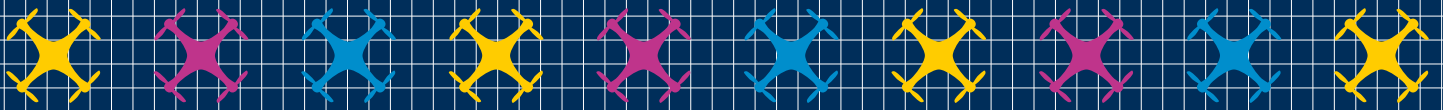
Traditionally, a dozen people are on hand to run Legoland’s Monster Skytacular show, including drone pilots, spotters, and assist technicians who run test sequences, inspect the equipment,

and ensure batteries are charged. About half the team works on the drones, while the rest oversee the fireworks and the show’s other elements.

Moving forward, the sky is the limit for entertainment leveraging drones, though viewer expectations are also constantly rising.

“What once amazed audiences with 100 drones, now feels underwhelming due to the visibility of massive, elaborate drone shows online,” says Clarmo. “The standard has shifted. People expect intricate designs and seamless choreography. Investing in a show that has at least 300 drones with visually complex formations will ensure that you meet the audience’s desire for spectacle.” 





THE FUTURE OF FLIGHT: SHAPING U.S. DRONE POLICY

by Keith Stephenson, director of IAAPA public affairs

EDITOR'S NOTE: The widespread use of drones brings both unique challenges and opportunities for attractions owners, operators, and manufacturers. On one hand, drones are revolutionizing evening events and shows that use the night sky as a canvas. On the other hand, concerns about airspace security and the potential for malicious use of drone technology must be carefully addressed.

Funworld asked IAAPA's North American public affairs team to showcase how they continue to collaborate with policymakers advocating for new laws and regulations that balance the needs of maintaining drone innovation and providing airspace protections for fixed-site attractions.

Policy Advocacy

IAAPA continues to engage with federal lawmakers and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) officials to ensure that new drone laws and regulations establish airspace protections by creating designated zones above and around fixed site amusement parks. These zones would allow drones to operate safely for purposes such as enhancing live entertainment, improving safety and security, supporting logistics and operations, enabling aerial marketing initiatives, and content creation.

Additionally, IAAPA is advocating for airspace protections that would enable operators of fixed-site facilities to collaborate with local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies to detect and mitigate drones used for malicious purposes.

Elevating Awareness

In 2024, IAAPA served on the UAS (Unmanned Aircraft System—commonly known as drones) Detection and Mitigation Systems Aviation Rulemaking Committee (ARC) on behalf of the attractions industry in the U.S. The ARC provided a forum for the U.S. aviation community and drone security stakeholders to discuss and provide recommendations to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) for a new national airspace system (NAS) plan. IAAPA joined other impacted industries such as the National Football League. The forum proved a place to discuss and provide recommendations to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) for a national airspace system (NAS) plan. An approved NAS plan would create paths forward for proper certification, permitting, authorizing, and enabling the deployment of technologies and systems for the detection and mitigation of drones. These provisions would cause no adverse impacts to the NAS.

The ARC identified opportunities for new rulemaking, internal policy development, and guidance to ensure adequate FAA oversight for the use of drone detection and mitigation systems.

Technology and Safety Standards

IAAPA continues to advocate for the development of technology and safety standards for unmanned aircraft systems that will ensure drones operate safely and reliably. This includes solutions such as creating a unique identifier number for each drone—similar to a license plate found on the rear of an automobile, real-time airspace monitoring, and automated safety systems designed to prevent collisions with other aircraft or structures.

“Regional parks are always looking for ways to bring exciting new guest experiences. That’s why we started our popular Holidays in the Sky nightly show, which utilizes 500 drones operated by professionally trained operators,” says Matt Eckert, president and CEO of Holiday World & Splashin’ Safari in Santa Claus, Indiana. “We are pleased IAAPA has taken a leadership role in Washington, D.C. advocating for new laws and regulations that will enable our park to grow our show, while also protecting our airspace from the unauthorized use of drones.”

Public Awareness and Education

As drone usage becomes more widespread, IAAPA will also urge the FAA to enhance public education on drone safety and airspace regulations, particularly around attraction facilities where guests expect to have a safe visit. A recent FAA regulation known as Visual Line of Sight (VLOS) requires drone pilots to always maintain an unobstructed visual line of sight with their drone.

“Morey’s Piers has had our operations directly impacted by the dangerous use of UAS (drones) by hobbyists,” shares Denise Beckson, vice president of human resources and government relations at Morey’s Piers in Wildwood, New Jersey. “Presenting our industry to lawmakers and regulators as one voice enables us to advocate more effectively—against detrimental bills and regulations and in favor of beneficial bills and regulations.”

The FAA offers business owners and operators information on controlled airspace, special use airspace, critical infrastructure, national parks, and temporary flight restrictions (TFRs) for special events. Learn more at:



IAAPA's Public Affairs Team is committed to advocating for and safeguarding the best interests of attraction owners, operators, and manufacturers in North America. Connect with Keith Stephenson and Zachary Stokes at PublicAffairs@IAAPA.org





Facing Forward



Attractions move beyond barcodes to facial recognition

by Michael Switow

SIX YEARS AGO, CALIFORNIA-BASED AUDIOVISUAL solutions provider Mad Systems began exploring ways to provide greater personalized content for museum visitors. How could they deliver customized information at an exhibit, based on a guest's age, language, and interests? Initially, Mad Systems considered barcodes, RFID wristbands, and QR codes, as well as a custom-made infrared badge. Several shortcomings, though, quickly emerged. For one, devices had to be recharged. Frontline employees would also need to sterilize and properly account

for the equipment at the end of a guest's visit.

"We got to a point where we realized that we needed to find something that we didn't have to clean or charge and where we didn't care if people took it home with them," explains Mad Systems founder Maris Ensing. "Then it became obvious: The best tool is a person's face. It's unique and we don't have to look after it."

Like others working in this space, as Ensing went down this path he discovered that artificial intelligence-driven advances in facial recognition promise to reshape



how attractions engage with guests—and potentially usher in a new era of greater convenience, personalization, and security.

At the Front Gate

Convenience and security were among the driving factors at Changi Airport's Terminal 4 in Singapore, where cameras with facial and iris recognition technology have replaced immigration officials and cut the time required to clear international travelers by more than half. The technology is also used for check-in, baggage

drops, and boarding. Millions of passengers have used the system since it was introduced late last year.

Universal Destinations & Experiences was also an early adopter of facial recognition technology. Photo validation is now an option at the entrances to Universal Studios Florida, Universal Islands of Adventure, and Universal Studios Beijing to provide a faster, more seamless experience for visitors.

"Upon entering the theme parks, guests are asked to take a photo instead of scanning their fingerprint. The image is then securely stored and, on subsequent visits, is used to validate admission," explains Universal Destinations & Experiences' Director of Corporate Communications Brian Bruce.

At Universal Studios Beijing, photo validation is also used by guests to rent lockers. The resort's website notes that facial



recognition shortens waiting times and contributes to a lower carbon footprint by eliminating paper tickets.

“Photo validation is completely optional, and guests can choose to opt out of the service at park entry or by visiting guest services before, during, or after their first visit,” Bruce adds. Photos at Universal Studios Florida and Universal Islands of Adventure are deleted within six months of a guest’s visit to the park. Universal Studios Beijing retains digital images and templates for up to one year.

Bruce shares with Funworld that Universal Orlando is preparing to expand its use of facial recognition technology. The operator has already installed cameras at the entrance to Universal Express lanes for several attractions, including the Trolls Trollercoaster in DreamWorks Land at Universal Studios Florida. The biometric system will identify guests and prevent unauthorized access.

Records show Universal has also filed a patent for a machine learning system that uses facial recognition along with

temperature, sound, motion, and other sensors to monitor and improve the overall guest experience. In addition to monitoring line jumping and unsafe movement on rides, the Amusement Park Interactive Guidance System can reportedly track liquid consumption and determine if a guest should be flagged from purchasing additional alcoholic beverages. Universal submitted an updated patent application for this technology in 2024, after originally applying for patent protection in 2022.

Privacy Issues

While facial recognition has a broad range of use cases in the attractions industry, operators need to anticipate some guests will remain wary that their data could be shared or stolen, potentially leading to unauthorized surveillance, identity theft, or third-party tracking. Attractions that adopt this technology need to address these privacy and data protection concerns directly.

“We recognize that the public has significant concerns regarding data privacy, ethics, and the social implications of facial recognition technology, resulting in a cautious approach to its integration,” says Ensing.

“Given these considerations, our patented CheshireCat solution operates within a controlled environment,” he explains. “The server does not connect to the internet and it can be put in a locked room. Thus, ensuring it’s secure. This mitigates potential data breaches and external access. The data is not shared or accessible outside of the intended context.”

User information is also scrubbed from the CheshireCat databases daily to ensure no personal data is stored long-term.

Once Mad Systems decided to proceed with a server on-site, they discovered an important secondary benefit: the system operates significantly faster. Unlike remote servers which can experience latency times, CheshireCat recognizes individuals within a fraction of a second.

“Imagine that you’re standing in front of an exhibit and it takes five or more seconds for the computer to know that you are there,” says Ensing. “That doesn’t work. Visitors are losing interest and walking off to another exhibit at that point.”



Customization

While Universal Destinations & Experiences' current facial recognition efforts are focused on entry points, Mad Systems plans to use the technology to deliver personalized content to museum visitors.

Imagine being able to offer translations in hundreds of languages—via audio or machine-generated subtitles—and tailor an exhibit's description based on a person's age and interests. Young children can listen to one explanation with age-appropriate vocabulary, while teenagers are delivered another version. Adults might tailor their content based on whether they are a "stroller" who likes more detail or a "grazer" who moves more quickly. Similarly, if an exhibit is about Leonardo da Vinci, guests could choose whether they are most interested in learning about his art or science.

At the base of Mad Systems' work is a non-proprietary audio-video system named QuickSilver, which can run hundreds of parallel audio tracks—hence the ability to offer multiple languages and styles. Built on top of that is an artificial intelligence system named Alice that creates personalized content; a distribution system named Lory that delivers the content to personal devices; and the facial recognition system CheshireCat, which matches the content to each visitor based on their preferences and demographics.

Audio content can also be delivered directly to hearing aids, while translations in sign language can be sent to a visitor's smartphone.

Mad Systems is also at work on customized avatar docents. "When you walk in, there are four virtual people: a hydrogeology engineer, a research assistant, a field worker, and an administrator. Each avatar can guide you through the exhibition, providing a different perspective," says Ensing, whose portfolio includes projects at Mattel Adventure Park, Crayola IDEAworks, and the Truman Presidential Library and Museum.




Is Facial Recognition for Animals Next?

Scientists have developed facial recognition tools for wildlife and livestock to track individual animals, but the technology is not yet widely adopted by safari parks.

Instead, companies like Cincinnati-based Pigeon Tech have deployed image recognition and gamification to enable visitors to identify animals in real time is in use at the Fossil Rim Wildlife Center in Texas and in France's Parc Animalier d'Auvergne. Visitors to the Museum of Flight in Seattle can use the technology to identify planes. Like Mad Systems' solutions, the program does not require an internet connection.

"Guests can point their camera at a moving animal, six to eight meters away from their vehicle, and it will recognize the animal with a percentage clarity," says Pigeon Tech Founder and CEO Vijay Sabbineni. Visitors can bookmark the animals they've seen and take quizzes to learn more.

"We have used it for the purpose of identifying the species," adds Pigeon Tech Chief Technology Officer Sreenadh Kondru. "We haven't tried it out at the animal level." But while Pigeon Tech's solution does not currently differentiate between the faces of two animals within the same species, Kondru says "it may be possible." 

Two women try out Mad Systems' personalized facial recognition system.





Protecting Guest Data

Cybersecurity practices that fortify attractions

by Gillian Berry

ACROSS THE GLOBAL ATTRACTIONS INDUSTRY, digital threats can be a concern. All attractions from theme parks and family entertainment centers, to museums and zoos, increasingly rely on tech for ticketing, guest management, payments, and other experience-enhancing tools. Cyberattacks, including phishing, ransomware, malware, and data breaches can threaten operations and expose sensitive guest data, impacting trust an attraction's brand.

To address these risks, IAAPA Head of Global Technology Gillian Berry offers insight and consults with experts within the pages of Funworld. From the latest cybersecurity threats to best practices for combating them, keeping threats at bay can keep an operation moving smoothly.

It's Not If, But When...

In 2024, the Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) reported an average of 2,244 cyberattacks per day, meaning a cyberattack occurs every 39 seconds—with 43% of the attacks targeting small businesses. While technology often brings efficiency and innovation to attractions, new technologies also open the door to fresh vulnerabilities. Additionally, according to the Trustwave 2020 Global Security Report, the travel and tourism industry was ranked third in cyberattack incidents, making location-based

entertainment venues one of the most susceptible to these types of threats. As Javier Pinillos Sanchez, head of cybersecurity at Parques Reunidos in Madrid says, their attractions implement protections on a daily basis, since day-to-day operations rely heavily on the use of digital platforms.

“As Parques Reunidos is a company that sells tickets online and collects our customers' email addresses, our worst-case scenario from a cyber perspective is any attack that could impact our daily operations,” Sanchez says. He explains an attack could knock ticket sales offline or impede verifying tickets at the front gate of an attraction.

“If there's an exfiltration of our customers' personal data during the attack, we would be riding the perfect storm, as we would be exposed not only to a reputational crisis, but also to a regulatory sanction under GDPR [General Data Protection Regulation].” The GDPR is a European Union (EU) law passed in 2018 that governs how data can be used, processed, and stored. The law must be followed by all companies working within the EU.

The Rise of AI

Artificial intelligence (AI) has also brought about new advancements in the world of technology. Simultaneously, AI has also introduced a series of usage and security considerations. Rich Raymont, information communication technology manager at Dreamworld theme park on Australia's Gold Coast, uses AI for a variety of business purposes and recognizes the importance of establishing guardrails around its usage.

“We are at the start of our AI journey and recognize the need to develop policies and controls around the general use of AI,” he shares. “These will need to consider data privacy, bias prevention, scalability, skills requirements, and cost effectiveness to ensure responsible use and meaningful return on investment.”

Data breaches can happen in any attack and are almost always more costly to repair and remediate. The harm that results from a mass data breach is not always just financial (although financial fraud is a serious consequence and strong probability). It's the damage to

an attraction's reputation that can be the most catastrophic and the most difficult to rebound from. To prevent this, Raymont employs a comprehensive cybersecurity strategy to prevent cyberattacks from reaching, or heavily affecting, Dreamworld.

"This approach is proactive in preparing for, withstanding, and quickly recovering from a cyber incident, ensuring minimal impact and disruption to business operations," he says. "The strategy focuses on the zero-trust model of cybersecurity. There are many internal monitoring tools to swiftly identify and block bad actors on our network before they can cause damage or exfiltrate data," Raymont tells Funworld.

Dreamworld will monitor internal data sources for irregular activity and regularly cleanse files, ensuring the operator only keeps what is necessary on file.

"We also partner with best-in-breed companies that host our data externally to ensure that customer data—no matter where it is housed—is treated with the utmost respect and confidentiality," Raymont says.

Creating a Plan

While there is no foolproof security measure that guarantees full protection of an attraction's system or prevent falling victim to potential cyberattacks, there are steps that aquariums, science centers, and all attractions can take to help mitigate their success.

An attraction's first line of defense is always going to be its team members. Douglas Nolli, the IT manager at Interparques, an attractions operator based in Brazil, stresses the importance of training and awareness for all personnel.

"Training and awareness are essential. It is important for all employees, regardless of their role, to know that security is part of everyone. People are still the weakest link in today's world. Artificial intelligence is strongly focused on deceiving people. So, the challenge is people," Nolli says. He encourages owners and operators to think about how much they invest in cybersecurity. This includes hiring a serious and reliable company for effective

implementation of security protocols. Protecting the information of guests and the digital systems where the data resides should be a top priority. Nolli further explains operators need to create a breach response readiness plan.

"We have a specialized company that already understands our scenario—never an individual—but rather a team. In an increasingly connected world, cyber security emerges as a crucial line of defense for companies and individuals. Protecting data and information is not just a preventative measure, but an imperative need," he says.

Attraction and facility operators should start—if they haven't already—developing their cyber security governance and response strategy. Detecting when a cyberattack is occurring is only half the battle, as executing a well-crafted response plan quickly and efficiently. Nolli shares that for Interparques, they're committed to identifying, investigating, and mitigating a possible attack within 60 minutes of the time it was reported.

Implementing an AI framework within a company's network for more in-depth monitoring, early detection, proactive alerting, and notifications can greatly reduce the risk of a severe cyberattack. Attractions must be willing and ready to invest in people with the right expertise and specialized tools to put prevention measures in place for well-balanced and harmonious layers of protection.

Nolli also says operators need to check that their systems are properly configured and maintained the park's specifications.

"I believe there is a huge gap between architecture, acquisition of a technology, and the adoption of that technology," he says, urging attractions to ensure their controls are activated as designed.

Not properly configuring a system can be attributed to a lack of specialized labor or the rushed nature of trying to open for the season. This is when gaps can appear, making it easier for an attack.

"You hear that famous phrase from managers, 'We invested so much in this control, and still, we were attacked.' Implementation in its entirety needs to be effective," Nolli says.

According to Sanchez with Parques Reunidos, the company invested heavily at the start of the decade, putting tremendous effort behind their protective measures and mitigation planning.

"Over the past four years, we have implemented more than 75 initiatives globally to ensure the security of our business and our guests. In the cyber world, it is necessary to apply the concept of 'layers of security', using GRC (Governance, Risk and Compliance), technical, and process measures," Sanchez says.

Parques Reunidos' results-oriented framework is based on four domains: strategy, secure, vigilant, and resilient. The operator has framework on what to do before, during, and after an attack.

No matter the level of cybersecurity protections put in place, team members are the most crucial tool in fortifying an attraction against an attack. Protecting the information of guests is a shared responsibility and a reminder to employees on the front line and back of house to stay vigilant.

The phrase "See something?" Say something!" rings true, even in the world of technology. 



Gillian Berry is the head of global technology at IAAPA, where she leads the organization's strategic vision while introducing innovative solutions. She's an advocate for leveraging technology to solve complex challenges. Connect with her on [LinkedIn](#):



PAIRI DAIZA



Pouring into Partnerships

Tapping into the guest experience with craft beer

by *Jim Futrell*

BEER, THE THIRD MOST CONSUMED BEVERAGE in the world, has long been part of the attractions industry. But in recent years, attractions have leveraged the beverage by tapping into craft beer sourced from smaller-scale, localized breweries.

While craft breweries started to emerge in the United States and Europe in the 1970s, their growth has taken off in the last two decades. Today, the two regions are home to nearly 19,000 craft breweries, nearly 90% of the global total. However, Latin America and Asia are also seeing an emergence in interest.

“For a lot of places [that] provide experiences, food and beverages gives the opportunity to stand out and add to the experience,” says Bart Watson, vice president of strategy and chief economist of the Brewers Association, which represents small and independent American brewers. “People used to go out to drink. Nowadays, people want to do something and have something to drink,” says Watson, citing places like movie theaters, zoos, and attractions that have added craft beer to their food and beverage (F&B) offerings.

In 2021, Airtopia Adventure Parks, a family entertainment center (FEC) with locations in Owasso, Oklahoma; San Antonio; and Hemet, California, formed a partnership with Illinois-based Tapville Social to install a tap wall at Airtopia Adventure Park in San Antonio. The tap wall is a self-contained draft system that allows guests to pour their own craft beverages. The tap wall concept has since expanded to Airtopia’s Owasso location.

According to Tapville CEO Joseph Tota, the tap wall provides an ideal solution for FECs as the self-service concept requires no existing plumbing and operates on a standard electrical outlet.

“It allows you to serve beverages in an efficient way with less labor,” Tota says, referencing a past visit to an FEC where the craft beer bar was closed because the bartender didn’t show up to work. Tota says Airtopia generates margins of 80% to 85%. Plus, with the RFID card that guests use to activate the taps tracking every ounce poured, the waste factor is only 2% to 3%.

Celebrating Craft Beer

Roger Williams Zoo in Providence, Rhode Island, first started hosting their Brew at the Zoo festival in 2014. The fundraiser attracts 3,000 people annually to sample more than 200 beers from up to 100 different breweries.

Chief operating officer Ron Patalano says they started Brew at the Zoo when park leaders noticed craft beer events were popular in the region and saw it as an opportunity to open the zoo to a new demographic group. “It gives [adults] the opportunity to enjoy animals in a different setting during a different time of day.”

Patalano says the key to their success rests in early planning. He recommends attractions ensure they can overcome potential hurdles—like scheduling enough brewers to help prevent crowding and ensuring there is adequate staffing. “It’s a very staff heavy show,” he says, noting that the event is run by two internal coordinators.

While other attractions continue to launch new beer festivals, such as Indiana Beach in Monticello, Indiana, and Beekse Bergen in the Netherlands, both in 2021, others at regional theme parks only lasted a few years.

The Brewers Association’s Watson says festivals have plateaued in the United States due to the challenge, cost, and complexity in a post-COVID world. He also sees an impact from the increasing number of places people can enjoy craft beer. “Craft beer is ubiquitous now,” says Watson.

Iowa’s Adventureland has long featured craft beer from its own state, but in 2024, the park decided to launch the Iowa Craft Beer Takeover. According to Matt Basart, food and beverage manager, the inspiration

came from a beer trailer they had purchased for their one-day Oktoberfest event that otherwise sat unused the rest of the season.

Basart decided to feature a different brewery at the trailer each weekend during the summer. On Saturdays, a brewery representative would be present to discuss their beers, offer samples, and hand out promotional items. "It was a way for them to get their name and product in front of thousands of people."

Basart was pleased with the results of the event, especially since it helped to build ties with potential Oktoberfest partners. He plans to relocate the trailer to a higher traffic area in 2025 and make better use of social media to promote the visiting breweries.

Making Your Own

Some attractions have rolled up their sleeves and now brew their own beer. Pairi Daiza zoo in Bruges, Belgium, opened in 1993 on the grounds of the ancient Cambron Abbey. In 2012, after several years of archeological research, the zoo



opened a replica of the monastery's original 1775 brewery. Pairi Daiza says that the brewery is part of a larger focus on creating a comprehensive visitor experience that includes food, drink, history, and conservation.

Argentinian adventure park Peñón del Águila also drew on history as inspiration for its own brewery. Located near La Cumbrecita, a Bavarian-inspired village founded in the 1930s by German immigrants, Peñón del Águila started brewing beer for its Gambrinus Refuge restaurant in 2007. Its success led them to develop an off-site production brewery in 2016 that now sells beer throughout the country.

Asia is still an emerging region when it comes to craft beer, but in 2024, the Sun World Ba Na Hills resort in Da Nang, Vietnam,

OPPOSITE: Pairi Daiza zoo in Belgium produces beer on the site of a 1775 brewery. LEFT: Pittsburgh's Penn Brewery produced beer named after some of Kennywood's signature rides. RIGHT: Sonder Brewing debuted Giga Coaster Lager upon the opening of Orion at Kings Island in 2020.

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LEFT: Giant Dipper Golden Ale from Discretion Brewing celebrates the centennial of the Giant Dipper at Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk. RIGHT: Kennywood's famed Potato Patch french fries are added to Penn Brewery's Potato Smash Beer.



opened the Ba Na Brew House. The seven-story brew house is topped by a restaurant and features a state-of-the-art German brewing system along with brewers and recipes imported from Germany. In addition to serving as an attraction, the Ba Na Brew House is also producing Sun KraftBeer for wide distribution.

Productive Partnerships

Teaming up with a craft brewery to develop an exclusive label beer is rapidly becoming the most common form of bringing craft beer into an attraction. While not a new concept—Kings Island in Mason, Ohio, offered Kings Island Draft in the early 1990s. In 2020, the park partnered with nearby Sonder Brewing to celebrate the opening of Orion, a B&M roller coaster with a 300-foot drop. Sonder describes their Giga Coaster as “lightly hoppy, very crisp, and has a very clean finish.” In 2024, Sonder produced Kings Island Blue Ice Cream Ale, a beer based upon the park’s famed blue soft serve.

Elsewhere, in 2010, Hog’s Head Brew debuted at The Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Orlando Resort. Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk in California, first partnered with Santa Cruz Mountain Brewing in 2011 to create a special beer to celebrate the centennial of their carousel. The 117-year-old park has since offered several beers to celebrate important anniversaries, including Giant Dipper Golden Ale from Discretion Brewing in 2024 to celebrate the centennial of their historic Giant Dipper roller coaster.

When Indiana’s Holiday World & Splashin’ Safari decided to add alcohol to its offerings in 2023, craft beer became an important part of their plans. “There was some apprehension in introducing alcohol for the first time,” says Matt Blumhardt, vice president and chief operating officer. “We looked at doing custom beer with an Indiana brand.” Holiday World found that partner in Bad Dad Brewing Company from Fairmount, Indiana.

“People like that there’s something unique they can’t get everywhere,” says Patrick Howard, owner and sales team manager at Bad Dad. The brewer had developed a strategy to create private labels for other businesses.

Blumhardt says it was important that the Holiday World beers tie into the park, but not be overtly branded as park beers. An internal team crafted a solution: develop a set of labels

featuring the park’s color scheme and create brands that hinted at the park’s rides and lazy river—Plymouth IPA, Bahari Blonde, Nevermore Amber. While the external packaging and labels were new, the contents inside was a beer in Bad Dad’s existing stable. With the introduction of Vekoma’s Good Gravy roller coaster in 2024, Holiday World wanted to do something exclusive. The result was Gee Whillikers, a cranberry sour. “We found a partner willing to be creative and do something custom just for us,” says Blumhardt.

For several years, Pennsylvania’s Kennywood amusement park engaged with local brands to reinforce the park’s reputation as a local staple. This caught the attention of Amy Huseman of Pittsburgh’s Penn Brewery, one of the state’s oldest craft breweries. In early 2024, she approached the park about forming a partnership. With Kennywood planning to open a new craft beer-focused pub, the timing was ideal. In addition to rebranding several of their existing offerings after Kennywood staples—Lager Jammer, Jack Rabbit WHEEEEEEEAT, and Kangaroo Hopped IPA—the two parties also developed an exclusive for the park with the Strawberry Funnel Cake Shandy.

“It’s been extremely successful,” says Justin Rossetti, Kennywood’s restaurant operations manager, noting that the shandy has become the best-selling beer in the park, outselling national brands. Based on its success, they developed a potato beer named Potato Smash that includes the same potatoes used at their famous Potato Patch French fry stand.

How to Hops

For an attraction interested in forming a brewery partnership, operators and brewers emphasize the importance of finding a brewery that fits an attraction’s culture and values. The brewery should be small enough to consider an attraction a valued customer, but not so small that they cannot keep up with demand. In addition, attractions should also offer styles that will be popular with guests, and ideally, brews should be low in alcohol so they’re drinkable on hot summer days. **FW**



Jim Futrell first became fascinated with the history of the attractions industry early in life. He’s authored 10 books on the industry, along with dozens of articles for industry trade publications, like *Funworld*. Jim began overseeing IAAPA’s Oral History Project in 2005 and currently serves as IAAPA’s historian in addition to being historian for the National Amusement Park Historical Association (NAPHA). Connect with him on [LinkedIn](#).





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The Women Who Changed My World

WHEN I LOOK BACK OVER MY CAREER in the global attractions industry, I am right where I need to be—thanks to women. Sure, there were a lot of long hours and late nights while on the clock, but it's these influential women who forever provided guidance, filled me with wisdom, and forced me to become stronger.

During my year as IAAPA Chairman, **I hope to ignite a movement where we encourage one another, actively make a new connection, become a mentor, or do something significant in the lives of another professional**, just like the women in my life. Each taught me a remarkable lesson, one that I hope will stir something in you.

Patrizia. I was just a 10-year-old kid when Patrizia opened my favorite Gardaland attraction early exclusively for me on a morning in April 1992. Her act of kindness became the example for the kind of leader I would eventually become.

We can always exceed our guests' expectations. It's our choice.

Manuela. As my early career coach, Manuela asked me, "Does Disney know you exist?" Her comment nudged me to reach out to Disneyland Paris with my interest in marketing. That became the spark that ignited my professional career.

We must show up. We need to risk being told, "No." Risking like artists, which we all are.

Marina No. 1. I called Marina, the owner of Le Caravelle water park, the day before my most important interview at the ripe age of 23. Her advice turned into my lifelong mantra: "Be humble first, then indispensable."

There is so much to learn from others, challenging ourselves, and committing over and over again.

Marina No. 2. The other Marina, my first boss at Disneyland Paris, said, "Il vuoto è lusso." Meaning, "less is more" in Italian.



SCOTT FAIS

Enrica. My grandmother Enrica said, "No leaf falls without God's will."

Trust the process, do whatever is in your possibility, and exceed what you think is your capability. And then, accept the outcome and ignore losses. If it's not meant to be, accept it and move on.

Kelli. I was part of Kelli's team when I was about to give up my role, feeling inferior. She taught me the phrase, "Yes me, better me."

Acknowledge that yes, you are the right fit for the job. And then stop wasting your energy in questioning it. Use this opportunity to become a better professional and a better human.

In addition, leaders such as Amanda, Cynthia, Karen, Luciana, Michela, Naydi, Pia, Sylvie, and Stephi all left a mark on me as brave, enthusiastic, and visionary women. And each I have met through IAAPA. I wouldn't be here without them.

We all make an impact when we show up; when we agree and when we disagree; when we speak up and stand for our ideas; when business and humanity are not competitors.

We can always be braver. It's part of our duties while being on this planet.

Find your voice and spread your good vibes all over our world. We all need you to lead us with empathy and positivity.

It is time. 

"... Each taught me a remarkable lesson, one that I hope will stir something in you."

Massimiliano Freddi is the owner of Wonderwood, a natural attraction in the Lake Maggiore region of Italy and 2025 IAAPA Chairman of the Board. He answers to "Massi" or "Max." Connect with him at MFreddi@iaapa.org and on [LinkedIn](#):





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